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ABSTRACT

There are parents and students who are to be won or lost depending on which sector--public or private--answers their calls for programs to match their learning styles and desire for rigor, vitality, and variety. This report examines where choice has evolved from, what it offers parents and students, and how its disappearance could affect this society. Chapter 2 explains how choices in public schools have grown since the 1960's with more than an estimated 10,000 alternative schools and hundreds of magnet programs. Succeeding chapters concern research on choice, curriculum alternatives in comprehensive high schools, magnet schools, the voucher idea, home schooling, tax credits, and searching for value choices. Specific chapters are devoted to "Los Angeles: A Study in Choices" and "Private Schools: An Enrollment Saga." Chapter 8, "'Unconventional' Choices," discusses vouchers already in place in three states, students enrolled in schools near their parents' work place, day care programs, residential magnet schools, and proprietary schools. The last chapter, "Planning for Choices," is followed by a public relations plan for education choice and a bibliography. (MLF)

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CHOICES

CHOICES IN SCHOOLS:
WHAT'S AHEAD AND WHAT TO DO

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Choices in Schools: What's Ahead and What to Do was written by Jack McCurdy, West Coast correspondent for EDUCATION USA/EDLINE. We want to thank the many education leaders throughout the country who talked to the writer about the goals of common schooling and the trend toward broader choices within and without the public schools.

Choices in Schools is one of a series of Special Reports by the EDUCATION USA editors that seek to put timely, important information in the hands of those who provide leadership for American education.

Also helping to produce this report were Ashton Alvis, research assistant; Stanley Bandong and Clem Cleveland, design and production; Sherry Freeland and Norma Meyer, proofreading; Sharman Lofgren, systems manager; Mary Massey, editorial assistant; and Joanna Matthews, production assistant.

Anne Lewis
Executive Editor

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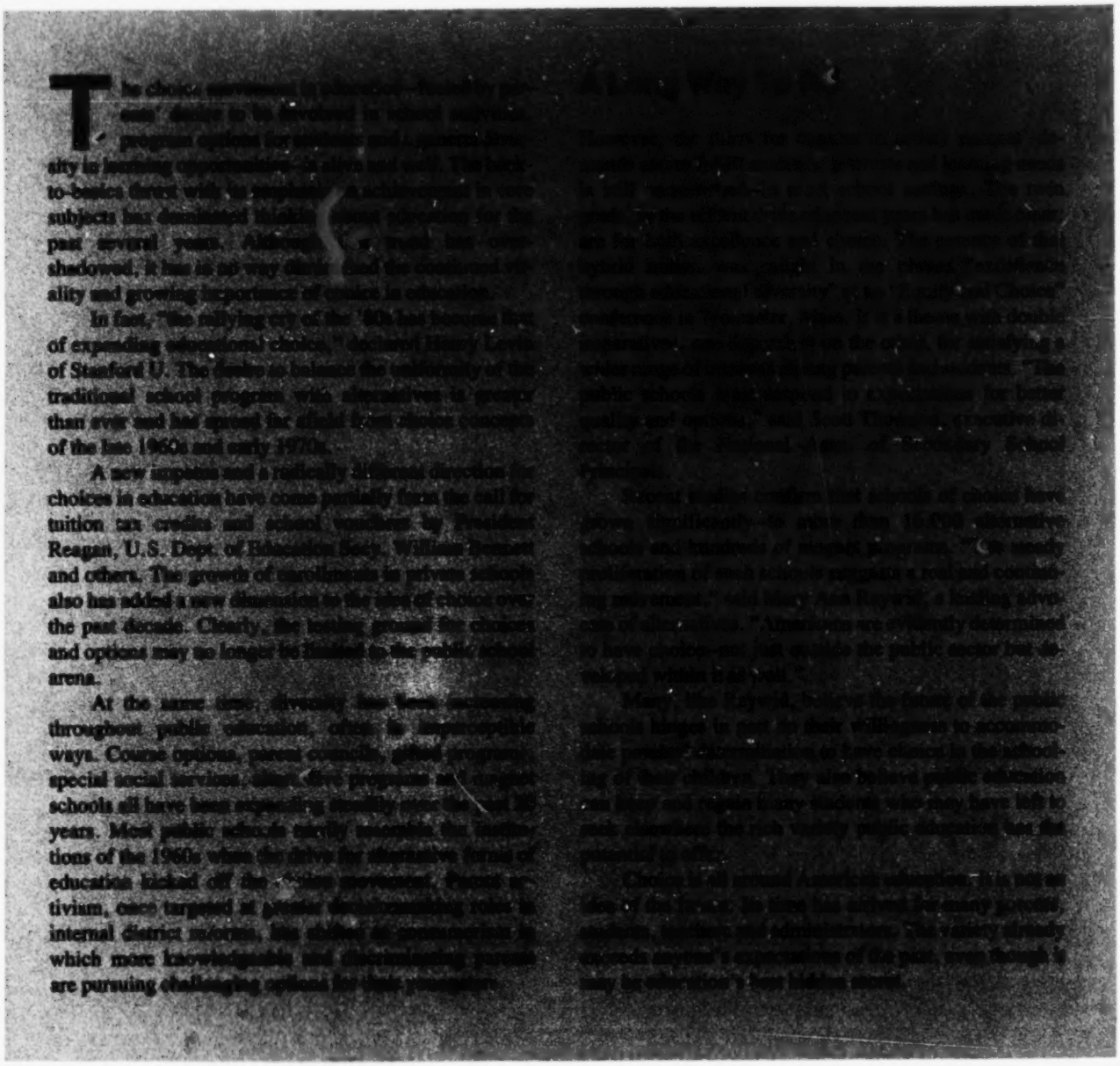
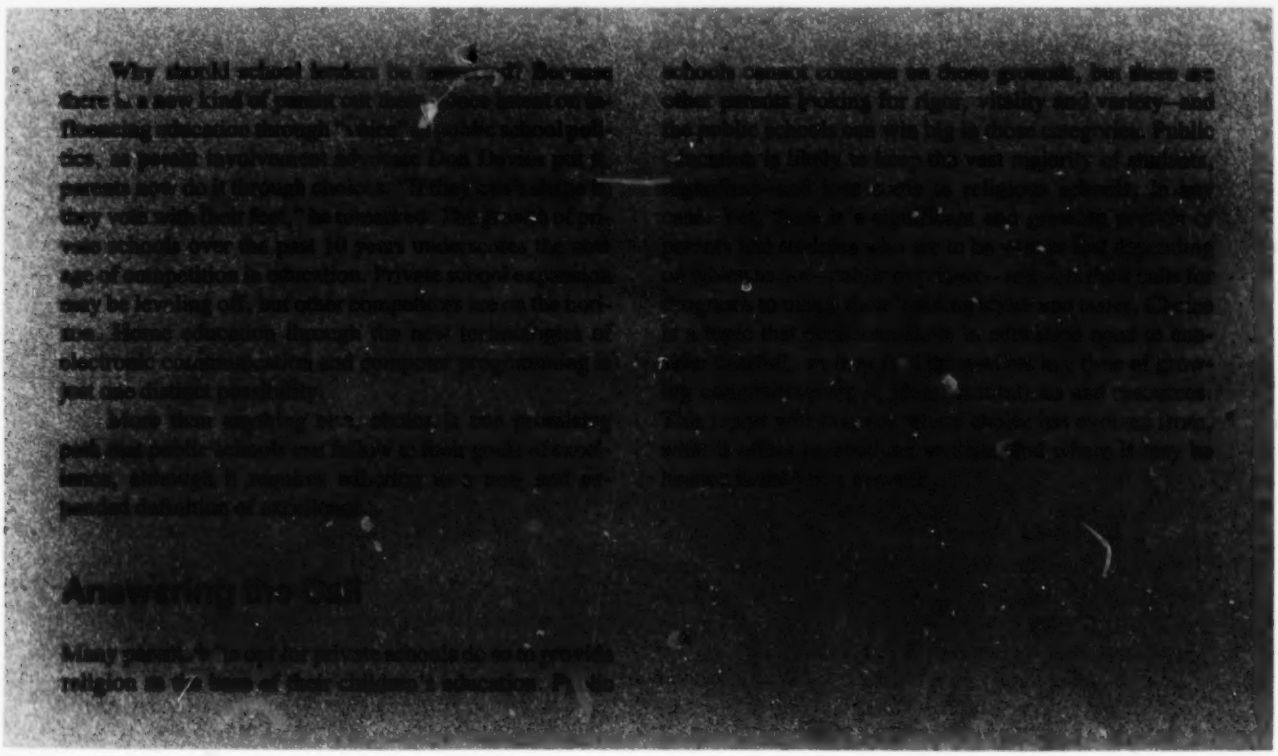
Introduction

A Matter of Choice





"I believe that we in the teacher union movement ought to support the greatest possible choice in terms of schools by parents, students and teachers. The current system is one that was designed a long time ago when most people who sent their children to school were not educated. Most of the people in communities looked up at the teachers and principals...and they just accepted the authority of the government. People aren't like that now... If students can move from one school to another, and we ought to consider the possibility of having students have the choice in some ways of moving from one district to another within the public system, it very substantially reduces the argument for giving money to parents to send their children to private schools. We could turn to a parent and say: 'You've got a huge number of choices here in the public sector; why not take them?'"

--Albert Shanker, President, American Federation of Teachers, 1985.

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Chapter 1

The Ideal of The Common School

Diversity in public education often is viewed as a product of the 1960s. That was a time when a free-spirit philosophy sought to make schools sensitive to the diversity of students through alternative programs. Another view traces the concept of diversity to heightened parent interest in private schools, which have experienced an upswing in growth since the 1970s.

Neither is correct.

Diversity in education is much older and runs deeper than either of these recent developments. It is, in fact, a part of American school tradition, one that affirms the "one best system" described by historian David Tyack never has been without abundant variety and choices for parents and students.

Diversity was inherent in the earliest American public school systems of the 19th century. The common school founded by Horace Mann and others in New England provided a shared experience in education for all, regardless of means--excluding most blacks, however. The nature of that educational experience was left to local communities. From that local determination came variety, reflecting differing makeup and interests of the citizens.

"Democratic localism meant that hiring patterns, curriculum, religious practices, political content and values represented rather heavily those of the surrounding community (who were) supporting the schools through their taxes," Henry Levin wrote in *Public Dollars for Private Schools*. Within the common school, he said, "there were different schooling experiences for various racial, ethnic, social and religious groups." Even though the "official" curriculum and pedagogy of common schools dictated many elements of their structure and practice, the "19th century common school provided anything but uniform and common education," Levin said.

From the beginning of common education, families could opt for private schools and were free to choose those that fit their financial resources. Then, as now, parents -- albeit mostly the more well-to-do -- had access to private schools that taught their ideologies or religious values. Although Mann cajoled wealthy parents to use the common schools, many continued to send their children to private schools.

"Common education is a beautiful concept but in implementing it, we fall down. We need to look at our own house and put that in order. The ideal is not being put into practice."

Carl Marburger, senior associate, National Commitee for Citizens in Education, Columbia, Md.

Parents Always in Wings

There also was variety in who attended common schools and in the ways they were run. "The very idea of a common school was that it incorporated a varied clientele," reflecting the ethnic and religious heterogeneity and racial and class divisions of the communities, according to *An Education of Value*, by Marvin Lazerson and others. Citizens agreed on the importance of schooling but not necessarily on its content. "Although parents wanted their children to attend school, they did not expect to abdicate responsibility for what took place there," they write. The idea of parent participation, in other words, is as old as the common school itself.

By the 1920s, educators had become aware of, if not preoccupied with, differences in students and their abilities. They called for individualized responses. "An alternative philosophy of democratic education was necessary; individuals had different capacities and interests, and a truly democratic education would accede to those differences by providing educational experiences congruent with them," the authors say. "A democratic education was one in which students learned different things in different ways. The conditions of learning were best provided in schools that offered a varied curriculum and varied teaching styles."

Much as they did later in the 1960s, schools sought to expand curricular choices partly "on the belief that giving students choices was a way of motivating them to learn,"

"A stable and democratic society is impossible without a minimum degree of literacy on the part of most citizens, and without widespread acceptance of some common set of values."

Milton Friedman in *Capitalism and Freedom*, U. of Chicago, 1962.

they write. The rationale for elective courses was that students were likely to take more seriously the courses they chose than the ones chosen for them. In the latest reaction, of course, reformers of the 1980s are pushing to make certain core subjects are mastered and choice is not a substitute for quality. And yet, the desire for choice to accommodate parent and student interests through, for example, magnet programs is just as strong today as ever.

Over the past 20 years, curricular and program choices for students have proliferated in public schools to meet criticisms that the schools are too uniform and unexciting. School districts across the nation offer everything from advanced and unorthodox academic courses to special programs for the would-be dropouts and what is now often referred to as the "disengaged" student. Schools today "are doing more for more people than they've ever done before," said David Cohen of Harvard U.

But the schools have achieved something even more significant--and perhaps more troublesome--for their own well- being. From its beginning, the local common school experience has permitted inequalities to develop. The public schools have reflected differences in local tax resources, social class, race, religion and politics. Even within districts and individual schools themselves, the concept of a common education has been more of an ideal than a reality because of instances of tracking, discrimination and segregation. To erase these inequalities, a different kind of reform movement has arisen during the past 30 years.

A Shift in Power

Schools have achieved remarkable success in equalizing school finances, eliminating religious practices, reducing patterns of racial and sexual discrimination and providing equal opportunities for all students, including the handicapped. Stimulated by courts and sometimes the states, these efforts, while benefitting those once disenfranchised in school matters, have most affected those once served best by the public schools. Levin describes the shift this way:

". . . compared to the past there has clearly been a movement toward greater opportunities for students who were formerly neglected, along with a complimentary movement toward fewer opportunities to influence local public school practices by those who formerly had the power to do so. The loss of influence in the system of public education has been highest among those with the greatest options in all other aspects of their lives because of their higher incomes, social status and political resources, as well as among those with strong political and religious views who have lost the ability to foster those views in schools. It is these groups that have become most frustrated and that are looking for ways to expand educational choice."

This explains why Americans may view their schools with what Cohen calls a "split vision"--sometimes celebrating them and sometimes condemning them. At the same time they celebrate the expanded equality achieved in recent years, citizens also become part of a "flight from common education, presumably stimulated precisely by those gains," he wrote in *Education and Urban Society* (May 1984). In short, the progress made toward achieving noble principles behind the common school idea has led to eroded support for public education. Some parents have begun to look outside the system for schooling of their children.

Consequently, parent interest in private schools and home schooling is rising. There is a renewed call for options such as tuition tax credits and school vouchers. Although private education always has been an option for parents, tuition tax credits and vouchers backed by public funds could make private school accessibility greater than ever imagined. A system of tuition tax credits and/or vouchers clearly would redefine the concept of diversity in education in America.

But, parents and students also want more diversity within the public schools. Enrollments in alternative, magnet and other kinds of specialized schools and programs are ex-

"The concept of a common preparation for a democratic society for all citizens and its actual implementation on a universal scale were unprecedented. Yet the common school could not be unaffected by the prevailing ideology in capitalist America that individual liberty and choice were at the base of the society. Those with more wealth and privilege expected that their children would be treated accordingly by the educational system. Those with strong religious, political and philosophical values expected that the schools would either reinforce or not contradict these values. Local control of schools within state systems provided a solution to the tensions between private and public goals by permitting substantial and systematic diversity within an overall system of common schools."

Henry Levin, "Educational Choice and the Pains of Democracy," in *Public Dollars for Private Schools*, edited by Thomas James and Henry Levin.

panding, and in many cases, there are waiting lists for coveted spaces. Some districts are experimenting with magnet boarding schools, and other innovators both in and outside of public education are attempting to design home education systems through computers and television cable networks. The potential for educational diversity seems unlimited.

What does all this mean for the notion of a common education, that idea long regarded as essential to prepare citizens to participate in a democratic society? Is that notion still relevant? If so, how would its disappearance as a guiding principle for schooling affect this society?

Defining 'Common'

First, what is this common educational experience that has been so long and widely esteemed? Levin provides this definition:

> *". . . students must learn that we are a nation of laws that entail both rights and obligations for all students; that there exist political processes for resolving public conflict; that participation in such political processes requires knowledge of issues and exposure to other points of view, as well as discourse; and that ultimately one must act on one's political views through voting for representatives or through more direct forms of political participation.*
>
> *"They must learn a common language that can be fully understood and used for social, cultural and commercial intercourse throughout the Republic. This does not mean the exclusion of other languages as much as it means the affirmation that a single language will be the official one that will be used widely and that will be assumed to be known by all citizens. Literacy in that language will include the ability to read, write, speak and understand it in its daily use in the political, social and economic arenas. Literacy in scientific and arithmetic skills for effective participation in society is also a necessity, as is the knowledge of music and the arts that contribute to the full development of a social entity.*
>
> *"Finally, common schooling meant learning the dominant forms of work and work organizations as well as the requirements for participating in those organizations. In a modern capitalist economy, pupils must learn the nature of property rights and the rights of workers, including those related to collective bargaining. They must understand the principles of hierarchy and supervision, division of labor, labor markets, wages and salaries, consumption and saving and so on."*

Exactly how the public schools have measured up to this definition over the past 150 years cannot be precisely determined. Yet, the vast majority of children have attended public schools during that time--and still do--and these schools have provided most of the elements of a "common education." As a result, public schools deserve credit for the American dedication to democratic values that have produced long-term social cohesiveness.

To many, these benefits of a common education are priceless. Common schools for more than a century have been "one place, at least in theory, where the color of skin or bank account did not matter," educational historian William Reese of Indiana U. said. Workers during the time of Andrew Jackson, Cohen said, believed common school education was not common at all, but very special, and that without it, democracy would not work. "The very term 'common school' referred to something noble, to the hope of equal political participation in what seemed a very unequal society." Inequalities have not been eliminated, but the common school still symbolizes hope and opportunity to overcome disparities. "The notion of a common education shared by all students," Lazerson said, "is an essential goal we ought to value--an ideal." The fact that the idea has not always been realized "doesn't make it any less valued."

No democracy has ever worked perfectly in that regard. Yet it is an important "commitment we all share, and we ought to remain committed to our children as well as other people's children," Lazerson said. Dale Mann of Teachers College at Columbia U. said an American society without common schools is unthinkable. "How do you aspire to have a democracy and a viable economy that rests on the kinds of widely shared skills and abilities ours does without a public school system? If we have youngsters who never see another child of color how do you create a multi-ethnic society?"

New Threats

Some believe tuition tax credits and vouchers represent an unprecedented threat to the common education tradition. Because common schools have enjoyed such a secure position in American culture, the effort to enact tuition tax credits and vouchers "constitutes a major shift in popular political and educational thought," Reese said. A wide cross-section of intellectuals, religious figures and elected officials in Washington and elsewhere "now publicizes the benefits of private, not public, education," an effort never seen before, Reese said.

The fear is that if large numbers of youngsters transfer to nonpublic schools, they would not be assured of exposure to the essential elements of a common education. Without public control over the content of schooling, there would be no way to guarantee that critical features of a common educational experience are provided. The ideal of schools in which rich and poor alike receive a common educational experience could give way to schooling that mirrors racial and class divisions in the classroom.

A certain tension between private interest and public

"We have always expected so many contradictory things from our public schools. We have turned to public education to secure a common citizenship and a common morality in a pluralist society, but have often found that this common morality abuses our religious beliefs or ethnic values...the expectations themselves have also been the source of tension and conflict.... Sometimes the expectations are contradictory--to eliminate class differences and to reinforce the social class structure, for example--and the result, inevitably, is conflict. Public education is both the source of America's most noble hopes and the repository of its greatest frustrations."

An Education of Value by Marvin Lazerson, Judith Block McLaughlin, Bruce McPherson and Stephen Bailey, Cambridge U. Press.

good always has existed within the concept of common education, a conflict between the desire for personal choice by parents and the quest for commonality by those concerned with maintaining a healthy democratic society. The shift to a greater emphasis on private education would serve to increase this tension by undermining the one institution which makes the public good its avowed goal, many believe.

Levin argued that "if individuals make narrow and parochial choices that simply reinforce their private tastes for schooling, then the broader requirements of a common experience for fulfilling the social, economic and political functioning of the nation will not be considered." Lazerson noted the shift could transform the values of choice and diversity into "self-interest and greed." And Reese said diversity could become a "guise for special interest and separatism" in education. "Parents who want to send their children to all-white (private) schools may feel it is okay because the President says it is okay," he said. The ultimate danger, Reese said, is in losing the "notion that the idea of common education is worth striving for" and in abdicating to a new "culture of self-interest."

Choice Leads to Chaos?

It also could mean losing the "larger social aims that keep society from falling apart or splintering," Reese said. In Levin's view, "strictly private choices in schooling are less likely to foster a democratic nation that they are to balkanize the nation into fragmented communities with their own beliefs and practices and with enormous potential for intransigence on any attempt to reach a national or even a regional or local accord on any contentious issue." It could "accelerate the inner-city and suburban gap between rich and poor" by "making inequality acceptable," Reese speculated. Ultimately, the result could be greater social unrest and upheaval. It probably is premature to contemplate such dire outcomes, especially because enactment of proposals such as tuition tax credits and vouchers is so uncertain. However, the consequences of diminishing what has proved to be an invaluable American public institution--common schooling--are worth judicious consideration before considering any change, no matter how small or well-meaning.

Chapter 2

Choices in Public Schools

Within the public schools, parents, students and educators are raising new and insistent voices for choice. There is a growing conviction that "a common purpose and a sense of choice and volunteerism is absolutely indispensable to create a commitment and incentives to learn," says Arthur Powell, co-author of the forthcoming book, *The Shopping Mall High School*. The idea of choice in public education is riding a crest of resurgence after the parent-participation and alternative-school movements, which began in the 1960s and spread steadily in the 1970s.

Increasing numbers of magnet programs, new and more varied alternative schools and other options attest to the vigor of the choice concept as an important element of policy-making in school districts. School leaders are responding to the calls for more rigorous preparation of students in English, math and other core subjects, but, with much less fanfare, they also are designing school options to accommodate and spark student interests, as following chapters explain. First, a closer look at the choice idea itself.

Choice in education is not new, of course, but it may be evolving into something new and different in public education. David Seeley, in his book, *Education Through Partnership*, said that "if voice is one of the basic ways people express their values, choice is another and quite different way. Choice is action, not words--deliberate selection among alternatives in an attempt to achieve a desired goal without argument or the persuasions of others." That kind of action can be positive as well as negative. Parents who pick and choose among schools--public or private--and program offerings "are choosing something they think will be of positive benefit to their children," he said. They are demanding with increasing frequency a range of options that would have been inconceivable 10 years ago.

Parents as Consumers

The impetus comes from a "surge on the part of new parents," said Carl Marburger of the National Committee for Citizens in Education. "They are saying, 'We want involvement.' The older ones from the 1960s are tired. (The new surge) reflects new frustrations of parents with schools." It also reflects a "wider variety of individual interests," said Lloyd Nielsen, superintendent of the Roseville public schools in suburban Minneapolis. Today's parents are more educated and have been raised in an atmosphere that offers and encourages diverse interests in many areas. "That's positive," said Nielsen, former president of the American Assn. of School Administrators.

"In the broadest sense, we are in a consumer-dominated society," said Scott Thomson, executive director of the National Assn. of Secondary School Principals. "In the commercial market, we buy the best product. That is transferred over to the public sector and as a result, public schools face a new situation." Thomson added, "We are seeing young 'Yuppie' parents absolutely involved and committed to wanting their children to learn." They want choice "but not in the old sense" as represented by drop-out and remedial programs. Rather, they want "more specialized programs with a scholarly purpose." These parents seek pragmatic benefits that satisfy the interests of youngsters, motivate them to learn and provide competitive advantages in adult life.

Although the "one best system" never really existed, there has been a growing awareness over the years that options in education were too narrow to match the learning differences of children. "What this new, highly informed breed of parents--and perhaps especially the young parents of the postwar baby boom generation--is in the midst of discovering is that there is no single, uniform, widely agreed-upon, indisputably 'right' way to educate all children," wrote Evans Clinchy, an expert in magnet schools development, in a *Phi Delta Kappan* article.

"They are discovering that the so-called experts, from academic theoreticians to practicing school administrators, simply do not agree on any one approach," he said. Many parents, teachers and others in education have concluded that some children will benefit from a highly structured, traditional, "back-to-basics" type of school; others need a less-structured or "contiguous-progress" approach, allowing them to learn at their own speed; and still other students need

a role in deciding on how best they can learn in a developmental-type of schooling, Clenchy said.

A conference of parents and educators on Equity and Choice in Worcester, Mass., reached the same conclusion: *"There is no single kind of schooling, no uniform, no standardized curriculum, that is equally suitable for every child and equally satisfying to every parent and teacher," the conference summary said. "Parents must therefore be able to specify the different kinds of schools they wish their public school system to provide and then to choose the individual school or schools their children will attend, insofar as such choice promotes desegregation and educational equity."*

Choice Is Thriving

American education has been consumed by the back-to-basics reform movement of the past several years, so much so that the continued existence of schools of choice has been questioned by some reporters, Mary Ann Raywid of Hofstra U. remarked in *Phi Delta Kappan*. On the contrary, she said, choice has gained considerable ground since the 1960s with new and diverse support mounting from many directions. Clinchy, senior partner of Educational Planning Associates in Newton, Mass., wrote recently that "something important is happening out there, deep in the grassroots of our public schools."

He referred to growing interest in magnet schools, public school vouchers in states such as Minnesota and other options in education. Clearly, schools of choice are much more than "holdovers of the '70s struggling to survive in the very different '80s," Raywid said. They are thriving because of what is happening in the 1980s, buttressed by renewed interest in choices and options, an expanding body of information supporting their worth and more diverse use of the idea.

All this has happened quietly for nearly 20 years. By the late 1960s, the choice idea had taken hold in some public schools and begun to spread. The earliest alternative schools "grew out of the educational humanism of the sixties, which envisioned existing schools as cold, dehumanizing, irrelevant institutions largely indifferent to the humanity and 'personhood' of those within them," Raywid said. From the outset, the founders did not view themselves as offering any alternative to mainstream education. "Most viewed their programs as the kind of reform desperately needed by all education," she added.

The 1960s, she recalled, were not only a time of protest --symbolized in education by alternative-type programs--but also "a period of tremendous sociopolitical optimism and of substantial growth in our expectations for education." The new ideas stemmed from the lengthy critique of education that had been building since World War II. It spawned experimentation financed generously by both private and government sources. That investment failed to improve public education to the satisfaction of policymakers, however, and some researchers finally reached the now-famous conclusion that schooling cannot do much to bolster student achievement.

Back to Alternatives

Attention then returned to the alternative idea. Christopher Jencks and his colleagues fashioned the school voucher plan, which was implemented only in Alum Rock, Calif. The National Consortium on Options in Public Education was organized at Indiana U. to exchange information on alternatives and choices. Tyack's book, *The One Best System*, gave the movement a recharge by questioning the "assumption that there is one best way to keep school," Raywid said.

In 1976, "the idea of family choice in education received a tremendous boost" when a change in the federal Emergency School Aid Act authorized grants to support magnet schools in school districts involved in desegregation, she said. "It stimulated the nation's first widespread attempts to establish real options systems--as opposed to one or two alternative schools." Since 1976, magnets have become an integral part of desegregation efforts in urban districts. In recent years, as the magnet idea has developed, "a shift has gradually occurred in magnet school orientation" from a focus on desegregation to what one study called "an emphasis on providing quality education or educational options for the district," she said. As a result, magnet schools have become the most visible and widely discussed type of alternative school today. (See Chapter 5) Thus, school choice proved durable during the frequent turmoil in education over the past two decades. "The basic idea of choice appears one that will not go away," Raywid said. "When bested, it keeps resurfacing in new forms."

Unprecedented Growth

Alternative schools have expanded rapidly--from about 100 in 1970 to thousands today. No precise estimates are available, but a 1982 survey by Raywid for the Project on Alternatives in Education of the John Dewey Society found 2,500 secondary alternatives. The national total, however, is at least several times that because elementary school alternatives were not counted, and large numbers of magnet schools probably were not included, she notes. Several years ago Raywid estimated more than 10,000 alternative schools or programs were operating in about 80% of the nation's larger school districts.

All indications point to continued growth, both in numbers and size. Nearly half of the schools surveyed reported enrollment growth over the past several years in spite of imposed enrollment limits in some cases and often enrollment declines in their districts. The pace may be accelerating. Raywid and other alternative school sources indicate increasing interest and activity, and administrators of

large magnet programs report brisk inquiries from other districts about how to run alternatives. Raywid's survey found alternative programs in all sections of the country, with the largest number in California (about 300 high school programs).

Alternatives, the survey found, also show staying power, with about half of them at least 6 years old. Although most alternative schools are located in urban areas, suburban districts are catching up fast. More than half the alternative programs established in the past 10 years have been in suburban areas, the survey found. "Overall the numbers have changed enormously, showing a steady growth pattern," it concluded.

Perhaps the best way to identify types of alternative schools is by characteristics common to all. Raywid cited these traits in *Educational Leadership* (April 1984):

- A distinct and identifiable administrative unit with its own personnel and program, which makes a special effort to create a strong sense of affiliation within the unit.
- Strong emphasis on school climate through the structures and processes within the unit.
- Participation of students based on choice rather than assignment.
- Designed to respond to needs, desires or interests not addressed in other schools.
- Launched and designed by teachers, students and/or parents.
- Concern with student development in a broader sense beyond just the cognitive or academic sides.

In organization and structure, alternative schools usually are smaller than conventional ones. Nearly 70% had fewer than 200 students, the Raywid survey found. They are housed in separate school buildings, schools-within-schools, storefronts or other "outposts." The goal is to achieve enough separateness to establish a distinct climate and enough autonomy so teachers can develop their own program. Philosophically, they range from open or free schools to fundamental or military. They are found at all grade levels but more often at the secondary level. Elementary alternatives tend to be identified with curricular approaches, such as open, basic or Montessori. Secondary alternatives are divided, with magnets focused on curriculum and non-magnet alternatives on school climate.

Different 'Feel and Flavor'

In process, the "feel and flavor" of alternatives are different. Many analysts have attributed the distinctiveness to the element of choice which "serves to heighten one's investment in what has been chosen." Choice also creates a group of people--teachers, students and parents--who are similar or united in their educational tastes and goals. Their "like-mindedness and cohesion" have been compared to that of private schools and the attributes of successful programs described in effective school research, Raywid noted.

Another aspect is that their small size allows "everyone to know everyone else" and generates personal attention. This tends to make bureaucratic controls and hierarchical divisions of responsibilities unnecessary. Therefore, responsibilities in alternative schools tend to be shared broadly among teachers and students--with teachers involved in administration and counseling and students and administrators in some teaching functions.

Choice also makes for a different kind of social order, in which all share a sense of autonomy, control and responsibility for the program. Research indicates teachers and students feel a strong sense of autonomy or control over their lives in these schools. For students, that may stem from the fact that smaller organizations have less need for rules and regulations. Also, alternative schools tend to allow more freedom in dress, language and behavior. Students also point to the different kinds of teachers in alternative schools, whom they tend to describe as "caring." And then, of course, students usually have the option to withdraw if dissatisfied.

In terms of goals, Raywid said, alternative schools are likely to be concerned with student development both academically and intellectually, as well as socially and personally, which includes molding character and shaping values. This shows up in two ways. One is a conscious attempt to enhance personal growth in decision-making ability, moral maturity and self-knowledge. Another is encouraging students to realize their individual potential rather than measuring their performance according to group norms. "This does not mean an indifference to standards," Raywid said. "Many alternative school students report working far harder...than ever before. It does mean, however, that these standards are not likely to be imposed or regulated by standardized tests." This approach to student development becomes highly personalized. "Systematic efforts to help someone grow require extensive knowledge of that individual," Raywid said.

In instructional practices, alternative schools use group learning. Unlike group instruction in conventional schools, however, it often has enough flexibility to permit individualization. The key is independent study which fosters individual interests and needs. Frequently, students are allowed to pursue topics or projects that interest them. Even in dealing with essential or required academic content, independent study allows some to work at more advanced levels and others at more elementary or remedial levels. "Collectively, these diverse arrangements may constitute the major device for 'individualizing' instruction in schools of choice," Raywid said.

Learning By Doing

Another facet of independent study is experiential learning, including, for example, observation of professionals at work or internships in career situations. This also includes peer

tutoring, which research shows provides important academic benefits for the tutors as well.

In curriculum, teachers tend to have more control over the content and to organize it around themes rather than separate disciplines. Although most schools develop their own curricula, one that is used by a number of alternative schools is the Foxfire approach to teaching English, history and sometimes other subjects. It grew from an oral history project by an English teacher in Rabun Gap, Ga. It combines experiential and classroom learning by integrating school and community.

The curriculum most often distinguishes magnet or specialty high schools, with arts the primary concentration, followed by humanities or social sciences and vocational or career orientations, along with intensified academics. At the elementary level, basic skills rank first, with Montessori or individualized learning and arts next. Back-to-basics or fundamental schools have been one of the fastest growing areas of alternative education in recent years. Their emphasis on the traditional curriculum, including rote learning and deference to authority, underscores that alternative schools do not fit the "do-your-own-thing" stereotype from the 1960s that still survives in some quarters.

"Alternative schools have changed markedly in both mood and tone within the past decade," Raywid wrote in *Phi Delta Kappan*. Beneath the surface, many of the early alternative schools "simply emphasized some degree of freedom from standard school procedures and requirements in order to proceed with a more substantial education," she said. Today, the variety is many times greater and growing wider. To say that today's assortment resembles the early unstructured alternative schools would be to ignore the main purpose of alternatives--to accommodate diverse interests and needs. The schools necessarily will represent a broad range of differences in content and goals.

"Excellence cannot be mandated. It cannot be imposed on any institution, nor can its participants be coerced into pursuing it. Excellence emerges as a quality of the particular goals and norms chosen, the understandings and expectations created and shared by a group of people. It is the commitment of the participants which is the key. More precisely, institutional excellence is not so much a matter of individual values, as of norms participants share, norms which define the crucially important climate or ethos, the moral order, of a school. The excellence challenge then is a matter of generating an environment conducive to a shared commitment to excellence."

Mary Ann Raywid, Charles Tesconi Jr. and Donald Warren, *Pride and Promise: Schools of Excellence For ALL The People*, 1984, American Educational Studies Assn.

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Chapter 3

Research on Choice

So how should we assess the record of schools of choice, based on what we know of their performance in recent years? By most accounts, they have done remarkably well. The shortcomings really have more to do with fears than real problems. There is legitimate concern over social class isolation resulting from middle- and upper-class children choosing alternative programs while other youngsters are left in conventional classrooms. But, as yet, there is no evidence that has happened extensively. For one thing, there aren't enough alternative schools. Advocates of alternative education argue that such problems could stem from faulty design, not necessarily from choice itself, and that safeguards can prevent such negative consequences.

Research on schools of choice has accumulated rapidly over the last 10 years. Most of it centers on students with problems because numerous alternative programs have been created to serve those students. Alternative schools or programs focus on underachieving, disruptive, turned-off and students with other personal problems that prevent them from learning. In her review of such research, Raywid reported these students do better in alternative schools. Their attitudes toward school improve, self-concepts and esteem are bolstered, behavior improves, attendance rates go up, drop-out rates decline and, not surprisingly, their academic accomplishments increase. The studies show less clear and consistent evidence of academic progress for average and above-average students because less research has been done on these students, but generally the results are positive.

Teachers Satisfied

For teachers, the benefits are similar. Alternative schools report uncommonly high levels of satisfaction among teachers, which they attribute to greater collegiality and more autonomy in their work, according to Raywid. The high degree of satisfaction among students translates into similar fulfillment and good feelings among teachers. Also, the opportunity to exercise control over where they teach and what they teach is a big factor. Raywid's survey showed that about 85% of the teachers in alternative schools are there by personal choice. And in more than 90% of such schools, teachers have a significant role in decisions involving school goals, curriculum, hiring, evaluation and budgets, the survey said.

Concerns about the impact of such schools of choice on students center on equality. Joan McCarty First of the National Coalition of Advocates for Students worries that the choice idea will be great for middle-class, educated parents and their children but bad for poor, minority parents and their children who do not have the wherewithal to capitalize on the opportunities. Cohen, who has written extensively about choice in education, said a key question remains: "Is it possible to expand choice in public education without expanding inequality?" First is apprehensive that the inequity in public education could worsen. "Poor kids now are held back, suspended, expelled and tracked in rigid ways,"she said. She fears that choice in education is a "smokescreen for separatism and elitism," which could seriously weaken the public schools.

"Family choice plans will not improve the education of all children," Richard Murname of Harvard U. warned. The process of selection for limited spaces in such plans means someone will be left out. "Those students most likely to be left out are students from low-income families...not able to provide consistent support for cooperative in-school behavior and regular completion of homework," he said in a paper for the National Institute of Education. Murname said there are several sources of tension inherent in the choice concept:

- Information for families about choice programs. Families want information on the performance record of students, but program staffs resist compiling it.
- Rules regarding admission to popular programs. Low income families want admissions procedures that guarantee access for their children, while program staffs want some control over admissions (often in terms of minimum skill levels in reading and math).

- Location of programs. Parents like several programs within the same neighborhood school, but staffs feel that threatens the distinctiveness of programs, which they say need to be apart to maintain individuality.
- Resources for choice programs. Staffs want above-average funding while staffs of other schools resist differential treatment.

In practice, critics say, schools of choice could produce cultural divisions by segregating higher-achieving whites in alternative programs and lower or average-achieving nonwhites in regular schools. Another result, they say, could be social class isolation with higher socioeconomic groups in special schools and lower or working-class children in conventional schools. One other outcome could be what is called "skimming" or "creaming" the more able students for alternative schools, leaving others behind. What could lead to these negative effects? The failure of low-income or poorly educated parents to exercise choices for their children, admissions requirements that could screen out poor children and the absence of programs to fulfill a wide spectrum of interests across socioeconomic groups. "Just putting options out there doesn't make it better," First said.

Choice in public education does not guarantee there will be no abuses, Raywid said. It should be approached as a "policy option" in comparison with conventional public schools. On equality, "we still are not doing so well on any of these questions" in regular schools, she argued. Alternative schools should provide "empowerment to those least empowered" by providing choice not now afforded them. The middle and upper classes have the resources to make important choices in education, Raywid said. Properly designed alternative schools would provide disenfranchised parents with choices they might never have otherwise.

Bonding Through Choices

On the question of cultural divisiveness, the underlying assumption is the common school is a "melting pot" that molds children from all classes into a cohesive people, Raywid said. "I don't think we are doing very well at that," she said. "We currently lack a strong sense of social coherence, but schools of choice would help by creating strong bonds among children. It would be the first step in enlarging that concept, that feeling of affiliation," she added. Raywid also contended alternative schools promise to close the achievement gap between white and minority students, not worsen it. To do this, more "curriculum uniformity" is needed, she said, but the beneficial effects of that concept can best be achieved by establishing common "content aims and concepts" for all schools and then "leaving to individual schools (alternative or conventional) how to deliver it best." Flexibility to achieve the content through different styles of delivery is what alternative schools are all about.

Raywid acknowledged that isolation is a danger because choices in general tend to be correlated with socioeconomic status. For example, more affluent parents often want "open education" for their children and "working-class parents want more structure." The way to avoid the inequitable effect, she said, is to set up schools of choice that appeal across racial and economic lines. Some alternative schools have done that successfully, she said. For example, one magnet program in the health services field provides pre-professional training for future physicians as well as nurses and orderlies. Another provides preparation in the aviation field, including training for future pilots, mechanics and flight attendants. By offering training at different skill and occupational levels in the same program, students are drawn from various social classes and academic backgrounds.

The best students are not skimmed from conventional classrooms if alternative programs are designed to serve all student populations, she said. One way is to avoid offering programs that have demanding or special entrance criteria. Another is to provide numerous choices, which affords more opportunities for participation and the likelihood of a greater cross-section of students being involved. Having few choices runs the risk of a tracking effect where only the most able or most motivated are selected for special treatment.

"It is a fundamental mistake to equate the presence of alternatives with either higher quality or what the public wants. It may be a serious mistake to equate public wants with public needs. All that might be guaranteed by a voucher scheme is that some sort of educational options would exist, not necessarily those that families want or need. Like commercial TV, the public may be faced with a plethora of 'alternatives,' none of which are particularly good or attractive."

— Arthuro Pacheco, *Educational Vouchers and Their Implications for Equity,* Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance, Stanford U.

Planning Can Avoid Pitfalls

The key is in planning schools of choice, Raywid said, and allowing teachers to create and help run the programs. With parents, teachers can fashion a variety of schools and programs to reflect their own varied tastes and interests and those of students. The school's operation and administration can guard against social or racial discrimination. "Without doubt, parents of all socioeconomic levels and children of all ability levels can be encouraged to exercise their options," Raywid wrote. "But if the system is to be equitable in this regard, careful plans and extensive efforts are necessary."

Charles Glenn, state director of equal educational opportunity in Massachusetts, believes "concern about educational choice (resulting) in unequal opportunity and segregation...is by no means an idle concern." In the past, he said, "uncontrolled choice has by-and-large operated to provide superior opportunities to white and middle-class children and to reinforce the racial separation based on residence." But Glenn is convinced that choice and equity are reconcilable. Through design and commitment, those two goals can be reached, and public education will be better for it. "The overall pattern of choice should be such that all groups in the student population are equally involved in choosing and benefitting from (alternative) schools," he said. "Care (must be) taken to make effective education of poor and minority children a priority in the development of new options." The "burden of proof upon any scheme involving expanded choice" is on those responsible for its success, Glenn said, and "I am convinced that a soundly conceived system of choice can meet this standard."

Defining An Alternative

What exactly is alternative education? Mary Ann Raywid says there are really two definitions, which she calls formal and substantive.

A formal alternative school or program would be:

- Open to all students within the district on an optional basis.
- A unit deliberately differentiated from other units in order to accommodate the needs or interests of students or preferences of parents.

The substantive definition supplements the formal one by adding a particular kind of educational orientation characterized by:

- An emphasis on the development of close interpersonal relationships within the unit and a strong sense of affiliation with the program.
- Different content and organization, often with courses drawing on several fields of study with integrated themes.
- Learning by participation or observation as contrasted with analysis and conventional study.
- Evaluation systems in which students often are asked to participate in self-evaluations, descriptions of activities replace grades and portfolios are substituted for transcripts.
- Fewer rules and less regulation of conduct with students involved in more individual and collective decisionmaking.

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Chapter 4

A Curriculum Of Choice

In focusing on the new movement toward choices and alternatives in public education, it would be easy to overlook the profound changes in schools during the last several decades. School administrators and teachers have not been idle in their search for programs to educate students in the common school tradition, expanding learning opportunities and services, which, in their own way, make the public schools more responsive to today's young people.

One hears a great deal about alternatives and what private schools offer, but comprehensive high schools serve students in a wider and more varied way than ever before. In the past five to 10 years, their programs have evolved into a rich assortment of courses and services to prepare students for college and work. They, too, comprise an integral part of the trend toward choices and options for parents and students.

"Since the turn of the century, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of curricular alternatives available to students in...comprehensive high schools," Richard Murname remarked in his study of family choice in public education. In fact, as he notes, the alternatives are so numerous that preparation of students in fundamental subjects such as English and mathematics sometimes suffers. This realization prompted the recent reform movement, spurred by *A Nation at Risk* and other national reports, urging more emphasis on academic content in the required curriculum of public schools.

But this is only one part of the story. Richer and more varied school programs also meet the more complex needs of young people who are themselves the products of a changing society. These societal shifts include the rise of single-parent families and working mothers, the loosening of community bonds because of urbanization and competition with classroom education from television and other entertainment attractions. The schools have responded, adapting their programs to new realities. They have expanded curricular options, psychological and personal counseling services, vocational/technological training and extracurricular activities. Murname, for example, cited research showing that more than 25% of the nation's 16,000 school districts provide some academic options. "There are more than 4,000 programs of explicit family choice already operating in public school systems in the U.S.," he found. These choices include alternative schools, but the more conventional options are impressive themselves.

Study Uncovers Variety

Thus, the "range of variety, experimentation and innovation" within school districts already is considerable, Dale Mann of Teachers College, Columbia U., said. "The diversity of American education is remarkable." But except for its presumed link to declining test scores in some core subjects, this greater diversity receives relatively little attention and credit. Public schools, Mann said, haven't done much themselves "to call that to people's attention." In fact, surprisingly little information has been compiled on today's comprehensive high schools and their programs. A new attempt to do so is *The Shopping Mall High School* by Arthur Powell, Eleanor Farrar and David Cohen.

This study is the second of a series on secondary education sponsored by the National Assn. of Secondary School Principals and the National Assn. of Independent Schools, of which Powell is a staff member. It explores 15 high schools, 11 public and four private, which Powell said are representative of the type and size that most youngsters attend in the United States today. Powell begins by describing how these schools see their mission:

> *"Student inclusiveness is the reality high schools must cope with. The students are different, and they are there. At the level of institutional policy, schools accommodate to this situation by providing something for everybody. They have expanded almost limitlessly the variety of experiences considered educationally valid."*

The term "curriculum" does "not do justice to this astonishing variety," the book says, because there are multiple curricula in these schools. The "horizontal" curriculum includes different subjects, such as English and math. The

"vertical" curriculum covers "various levels or degrees of difficulty" in one subject area. The "extracurriculum" includes sports and other nonacademic or avocational activities. The "services" curriculum addresses emotional or social problems of students. Then there are "top-track or accelerated" courses for the high-achieving or ambitious students and the special education and vocational/technical education programs for others.

Curricula Choices

The horizontal curriculum, of course, comprises many different courses in various subject areas. It has sometimes been referred to as a "cafeteria-style" curriculum giving students a wide array of choices. The vertical curriculum is, in some ways, just as varied, partly because of the levels or tracks into which certain basic subjects such as English are divided. Even within classes in the same level of the same subject--English II, Level 2, for example--"there could be profound differences depending on the teachers," Powell said. "The courses are incredibly sensitive to who teaches them." In one case, he said, two Advanced Placement classes in chemistry were adapted to differing group interests, one for students likely to become science majors in college and another for students who wanted to "sample" in a class with less rigor. Such finely shaded but highly important differences in the vertical curriculum were not obvious from catalogues, Powell said, but "students and parents knew what was going on." Students engaged rather easily in a "self-selection process" found across the various curricula.

Fastest Growing Curriculum

The so-called services curriculum, Powell said, probably has grown fastest in the high school program. It is aimed at the student with special problems, ranging from the handicapped to students with psychological or personal difficulties. Many of these services, sometimes offered as credit courses, are for students doing poorly in school, who often come from low-income and minority families. They include dropout prevention, tutoring, continuation schools and programs for pregnant students. But such programs increasingly are serving the middle class as well, Powell said. New services include "grief" counseling to help youngsters overcome the loss of loved ones, divorce resource groups, child abuse, single parenting and learning problems.

Work-study programs, to help students find work and help support themselves or their families while remaining in school, also are increasingly popular. "These youngsters wind up spending a lot of time with counselors, social workers, nurses and even security officers who sometimes act in the capacity of counselors," Powell said. Schools also offer many specialized programs and services for handicapped and gifted children under state and federal mandates, such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Since the 1960s, educational services for the poor have been emphasized, but Powell and his colleagues found that more affluent, white students also are being served in comparable numbers now. "This (service program) is not a poor people's movement," Powell said.

Extracurricular activities in high schools are not new, of course, but they have grown considerably in range and number. They include both interscholastic and intramural sports, debate, journalism, student council, yearbook, band and other activities that go beyond the regular school curriculum. Many require completion of credit courses for participation, Powell noted. The biggest growth has been in girls' sports, he said. In addition, many new sports are being offered, such as riflery and rowing. If anything, Powell said, the importance schools attach to extracurricular activities has increased. "They are considered indispensable to holding kids in school," he said. "We often heard the comment (from school officials) that if we don't find something kids are interested in, they will drop out or 'act out'." And it is not just participation in activities that concerns school people. They attach a great deal of value to students becoming "participants as observers" at sports activities, Powell said.

In the vocational education area, most schools have moved beyond the traditional manual training program often associated with this field, Powell said. There has been a significant increase in specialized and technical school programs, often regionalized through cooperation among districts or occupational training agencies. These programs feature better trained instructors and higher-quality equipment than vocational education programs of the past. (See Chapter 5.)

From this variety of offerings, students and parents may satisfy individual interests and tastes, learning requirements and/or personal needs. Hence, the "shopping mall" concept which Powell describes as "profoundly consumer-oriented" and "trying to hold customers by offering something for everyone."

Why Choice Doesn't Always Work

Yet if all this choice exists, why does it not satisfy parents and students? Why do they still pursue more or other choices, such as those alternative and private schools provide? Powell contends the shopping mall high school does not serve the average student nearly as well as it does those with special interests or needs. "If you are a special student, someone at the extreme top track or a troublemaker, the school is more likely to help you find your way," he said. "But if you are 'unspecial,' you are more likely to be left to make your own way." Many parents of average youngsters, he theorized, want more structure and less choice than the modern-day comprehensive high school offers. And some turn to private schools for that structure.

That seems to be only part of the reason for continued disenchantment of some parents in the face of a proliferation of curricular choices. Although these elaborate school progams are in many ways commendable and, it should be emphasized, apparently do satisfy the great majority of students, they lack what makes alternative programs distinctive. That is, a different educational style, an unconventional curricular approach and an emphasis on the school climate--the things, described in Chapter 3, that make alternative schools more responsive to some youngsters and, in most cases, quite successful.

To focus on the strengths of curricula is to miss the point about alternative education, Mary Ann Raywid pointed out. The reason wide curricular choices alone do not satisfy all students is they do not address the organization, structure and climate of schools. "The main function of alternative education is to provide a different kind of climate and environment," she emphasized. The success of alternative programs resides in their ability to "break the structural and management mold" of conventional schools, and to approach learning in a more flexible and personalized fashion. "The farther programs depart from that mold, the better they are," she said. The problem with choices in conventional high schools is that they come "in the same kinds of packaging" and fail to recognize that "kids become disengaged because of the climate of the school and the environment they are asked to survive in." The achievement of alternative programs, Raywid said, is that they have been able to get "disaffected and apathetic students to turn around."

> *"The modern American high school faces an impossible dilemma. Its primary mission is to offer a common educational experience for all students. Yet students have different interests, aptitudes and career aspirations."*
>
> *The Minnesota Plan: The Design of a New Education System*, BW Associates for the Minnesota Business Partnership.

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Chapter 5

The Magnet School

The fastest growing alternative in public education undoubtedly is the magnet school or program. Born of racial turmoil as a technique to desegregate schools voluntarily, the magnet concept has moved beyond its original purpose to become an important tool for educational excellence. The idea spread rapidly beyond urban school districts with racially imbalanced schools into all areas of the nation where new ways to improve education are a priority. School leaders see magnet programs as a way to make their school districts responsive to the varied interests of students and parents. Magnet schools represent "a model for choice and diversity," says one report.

In concept, magnet schools closely resemble alternative schools, and the names often are used interchangeably along with "special schools." They share certain elements: voluntary participation, a departure from conventional educational philosophy, a curriculum usually built around a theme and a student body drawn from a wide attendance area. "The concept that generated all of this (magnet school) activity is a remarkably simple one that has grown out of the alternative school movement," said Robert Barr, dean of the School of Education at Oregon State U. (*Principal* January 1982).

"Rather than being assigned on the basis of residential or geographic areas to local neighborhood schools, students and their parents may choose from a variety of specially designed magnet schools that feature unique curricular or instructional opportunities." Alternative schools in the 1960s and early 1970s attracted all kinds of students to their distinctive ethos, and the resulting diversity among students became a largely unintended byproduct. Magnet schools, by contrast, are designed specifically to draw from a broad area--usually throughout a district--to integrate education. The end result of both is much the same.

Under the Magnet Umbrella

Being different is a commonality shared by alternative schools and magnet schools, but there is nothing approaching standardization in either group. Magnet schools tend to be as different as traditional schools are alike. Within their number lie "differences as important as the similarity the nomenclature 'magnet' implies: they are different schools for different purposes," wrote Denis Doyle and Marsh Levine of the American Enterprise Institute. "They serve different students and reflect different community resources and interests," they said in *Educating Americans for the 21st Century*, a report of the National Science Board Commission on Pre-

What Makes a Magnet Succeed?

What are the characteristics of a successful magnet school or program? A federally funded survey of magnet schools across the country listed these elements of an "ideal design" for magnets:

- Voluntary district-wide access for students.
- A curricular theme that is definite, appealing and distinctive.
- A principal and a staff capable of accomplishing the theme as it has been presented to the public.
- Instruction that is regularly reviewed by the school district for its rigor and fairness, i.e. accountability.
- A facility and site selected on the basis of racial, ethnic and socioeconomic neutrality.
- Good transportation and school security services.
- Student and staff composition that closely reflects the racial and ethnic composition of the community.
- A method of checks and balances that will prevent segregation or educational deprivation in non-magnet schools.
- Startup funds for facilitating early success in implementation.

--*Guide to Magnet School Development*, based on *A Survey of Magnet Schools*, Rolf Blank, Robert Dentler, D. Catherine Baltzell and Kent Chabotar, U.S. Dept. of Education.

college Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology.

In 1983, the first comprehensive national survey of magnet schools and programs, conducted for the U.S. Dept. of Education, defined magnets using these criteria:

- A distinctive school curriculum based on a special theme or method of instruction.
- A unique district role and purpose for voluntary desegregation.
- Voluntary choice of the school by student and parent.
- Open access to school enrollment beyond a regular attendance zone.

The survey, authored by Rolf Blank and others for James H. Lowry and Associates, found that magnet schools over the last 10 years have grown to over 1,000 in more than 130 of the largest school districts. Judging by reports from more and more districts, that number undoubtedly has grown significantly since the survey.

From the outset, magnet schools sought to emulate the prestige and drawing power of such well-known specialty schools as the Bronx School of Science and the Boston Latin School. The early magnet schools focused on science, math and the performing arts but soon came to include open education, career exploration, basic skills, health sciences, foreign languages, humanities, business management, computer science and numerous other specialties. "The basic idea of developing magnet themes was that a district would determine the interests of students and parents in a special theme program and develop theme-based curricula in schools that would attract a racially heterogeneous mix of students," the magnet survey said. Federal support for magnets through the Emergency School Aid Act strongly identified the program with desegregation, which often was ordered by courts. The number of applications for federal magnet grants shot up from 14 in 1976 to more than 100 by 1980.

"The wide diversity among magnet school themes makes the point in a powerful way: there is no one best school for everyone. Just as some students do well at a music or art magnet, others do well at an academic magnet. As a people, we do need some common core of shared, cultural literacy, but that can be achieved in different settings by different methods. There are different ways of approaching and appropriating the common culture: different is not bad, it is just what it suggests-- different. And that is surely the reality of the modern American city: different people, with different interests and different learning styles. And different teaching styles, one might add."

Denis Doyle and Marsha Levine, *Educating Americans for the 21st Century*, National Science Board Commission of Precollege Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology.

New Roles for Magnets

As more districts launched magnet programs and the pace of desegregation efforts slowed, the trend in magnet development shifted. Districts that might never have embraced alternative schools found magnets embodied an attractiveness for students and parents that went beyond the purposes of integration. The magnet survey said the new trend was marked by:

- Growth in interest in educational options and diversity, including variety in curriculum, teaching methods and school design.
- Renewed involvement of parents and community leaders on decisions related to public education and concern with the quality of education.
- Greater attention to the outcomes of public education, including more career education and preparation for decisions on further education or training.

"By the early 1980s, the number of districts that had implemented magnet schools had grown far beyond the federal role in support of programs," the survey said. "The concept had attained its own popularity due to the combination of urban school districts' needs and the interests of parents, students and communities in education innovation."

By 1981-82, more districts had developed magnet schools without federal support than with such grants (72 to 64), according to the survey. The report also showed that 91, or one-third, of the 275 districts with more than 20,000 students, had started magnet programs. The 138 magnet schools in 1,019 districts identified in the survey were located in every region, especially the Northeast, Midwest, West and Southeast as of 1981-82. "It is apparent that the development of magnet schools has spread widely across the country," the survey said.

Magnets as A Reform

The experiences of school districts with magnets have been extremely positive, as indicated by their growth in numbers. That growth reflects an increasing recognition that educational excellence means more than academic courses, more time spent in class and more discipline. Evans Clinchy, in an article in *Principal* (January 1985), said educational excellence should presuppose "an educational system where every child--rich or poor, white or black or Hispanic--is assured the possibility of achieving excellence in some form, a system designed to guarantee that every child has full and equal access to the types of knowledge and skills that will produce satisfaction and success in adult life."

Magnet schools, he said acknowledge "a broadened definition of intelligence, recognizing that wide diversity of the ways in which children approach the task of learning." It also means, he added, "we cannot devise--nor should we

attempt to devise--a single, standardized form of schooling that will fully and fairly educate all children." George Tsapatsaris, project director of the Magnet School Network in the Lowell, Mass., public schools, put it this way:

> *"In a democracy, you can't just tell people what's good for them and then impose it on them whether they want it or not. Yet, that's what we have always done in public education. That's why so many parents want to take their children out of the public schools and--using tuition tax credits or vouchers--put them in private or parochial schools. That is often the only way that parents can choose the kind of education their children will receive. We are all individuals. We learn and work in different ways. If you give students, teachers and principals a chance to learn and work in an environment they prefer--a place they have chosen of their own free will, where they feel comfortable and respected--we think they will direct their energies toward a common goal: excellence."*

Doyle and Levine said that the likelihood of success in magnet schools is greater because these programs "build on the crucial intangible of education motivation" around a "philosophy of inclusion rather than exclusion, open to any student who cares to attend." In magnet schools, "students become willing and eager participants," they said.

Why is this so? "Choice is a virtue," they argue, "not only because of different learning styles, but because different people have different things to learn." Thus, magnets provide diversity such as music and art, vocational and humanities. There also is the "ambience or ethos" of magnet schools that Mary Ann Raywid and others extol, which Denis Doyle and Marsha Levine contended has a "powerful effect on personal behavior." At the same time, "magnet schools offer a setting in which teacher-generated reform initiatives may take place." Everyone talks about trying new approaches in education, but in magnet schools the spirit of experimentation and flexibility made it possible to do it.

Key Steps to Magnet Programs

1. Identify issues, such as community interest in magnets, need for desegregation or concerns about school quality.
2. Establish objectives for desegregation and education, including racial-balance plan and goals for increased options, academic improvements or career preparation.
3. Develop district strategy, including adoption of themes, location and types of programs and involvement of community and others.
4. Obtain leadership from district and school leaders.
5. Develop resources for startup, staffing and facilities and equipment, including community sources.
6. Select school design and staff corresponding to themes, facilities, and parent and community participation.
7. Write curriculum related to themes, district curriculum and innovations.
8. Publicize program and recruit students through various means, emphasizing equal access.
9. Organize students and staff for program placement and assignments.
10. Maintain support for magnets by publicizing outcomes, innovative features and community roles.

--Guide to Magnet School Development, U.S. Dept. of Education, by Rolf Blank, Robert Dentler, D. Catherine Baltzell and Dent Chabotar for James H. Lowry and Associates, 1983.

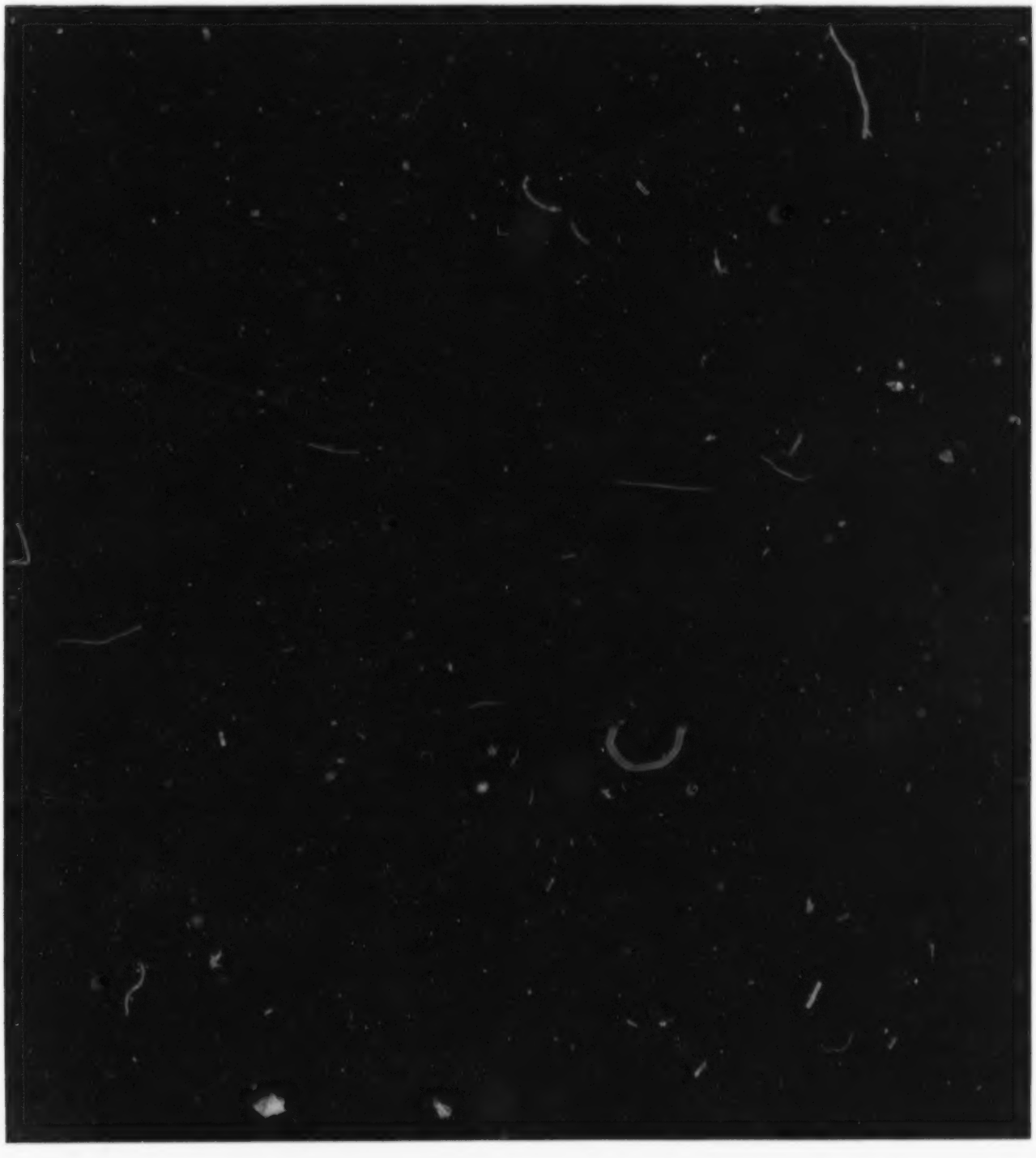
Research Confirms Successes

Findings from the magnet survey confirm that magnet schools produce results. It found "magnet schools can and do provide high quality education in urban schools and districts" and "do offer educational diversity and choice of type of education." One-third of a representative sample of 45 magnet schools had high-quality education as measured by ratings on instruction, curriculum, student-teacher interaction, student learning opportunities and use of resources. More than one-third of the others "exhibited some elements of quality education" and "virtually all offered important educational options and choices within their districts." Here are some other key findings:

- Magnet school quality is not related to size, type of theme or method of organization (whole school or within-school program).
- Quality magnet schools serve average as well as high-ability students.
- The degree of selectivity in admitting students is not related to the quality ratings of the magnets.
- Most magnet schools do not select only the brightest students and do not use achievement test scores, gradepoint averages or other similar measures as selective criteria.
- Voluntary enrollment improves the quality of education in magnet schools because more motivated students choose to enroll.
- Of 32 magnet schools reporting test scores, 80% had higher scores than the averages in their districts. Magnet schools also reported superior student attendance, dropout, suspension and transfer rates. (The results are partly due to the selection methods, voluntary enrollment and self-selection, the survey said.)
- Magnets have been used effectively to compete with

suburban and nonpublic schools for enrollments and to minimize the movement of students out of districts.

- The average cost per student in magnet schools is slightly higher--$59 in 1981-82--than for other schools.
- Extra spending pays off in better education in the magnet schools.
- The highest quality magnets had high levels of community involvement from parents, businesses, universities or community organizations.
- Community involvement included participation in designing programs, writing curricula, providing part-time teachers and arranging for special equipment or facilities.
- All magnet schools gained higher parent satisfaction



"(Magnet schools) work in large part because they embody two ingredients necessary to the educational process: choice and commitment."

Denis Doyle and Marsha Levine, *Educating Americans for the 21st Century*, National Science Board Commission on Precollege Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology.

than other schools because of voluntary enrollment, which resulted in new and unique forms of involvement by parents and community organizations.

- Districts with well-planned and publicized magnet schools found increased public support of the schools.

The ability of magnet schools to renew public confidence in schools ties in to many of the recommendations of *A Nation at Risk*, the 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, and other school reform reports, the survey noted. "By voluntary enrollment and by the public attention that magnet schools draw, the concept has the potential to significantly help a district in improving its image within the community and rebuilding the reputation of the public schools," it said. It may serve as a "catalyst for increasing community interest in quality education or serve as part of a larger reform strategy."

After seeing many families move to the suburbs for schooling or switch to private schools, Barr said, urban districts "have looked to magnet schools to help retard this migration." Why? Because "magnet schools can offer nearly everything the private academy or parochial school has to offer and, more important, are supported by tax dollars." Doyle and Levine said magnet schools represent a strategy that urban districts cannot afford to ignore. "Every major city and region in the nation could support staff and operate magnet schools," they wrote. "Indeed, in those cities without magnet schools, the only option available to parents who care about quality education is to buy it, either in the form of private school tuitions or a house in the suburbs."

Some Higher Costs

The costs of magnet schools vary considerably and, except for the limited sample in the federal survey, little solid information is available. The survey found that although the average cost per student was only $59 more for magnets in 1981-82, it was about $200 more in 1980-81. The higher figure, it said, was due to start-up expenses which declined sharply after the first year. The average cost per student in secondary school magnets in 1981-82 was also about $200 more but was much less than that for elementary and intermediate schools. Magnets cost more because of higher salaries for secondary classroom teachers and for pupil transportation, the survey said. That suggests more experienced teachers staff magnet schools.

Single-theme magnets were less costly than those with several themes, such as science/math. Overall, the survey said, annual single-theme costs per student were $1,899 for social studies, $2,214 for science/math, $2,408 for academics and $2,686 for arts. When two or more themes were combined in a magnet, the per-pupil cost averaged $3,358. However, the extra expenditures associated with magnets apparently paid off. "The costs of magnet schools across districts and schools are positively correlated with education quality," the survey concluded.

A typology of magnet schools is almost impossible to devise because their numbers are growing so fast and new themes are being added continuously. Some of the themes that have been identified, according to Doyle and Levine, cover basic skills, fundamental, bilingual, Montessori, vocational or career, arts, music, performing arts, science, mathematics, humanities, social sciences, health careers, accelerated academic, business and computer.

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Chapter 6

Los Angeles: A Study In Choices

The Los Angeles city school system: the nation's second largest, 565,000 students, 714 square miles in area, stretching 60 miles from the cool foggy waters of the harbor at San Pedro to the brush-covered arid foothills above San Fernando Valley. Its hallmark always has been diversity--in the ethnic origins of the many groups and immigrants who settled its neighborhoods, in the physical and cultural geography of the contrasting regions and communities and in the kind of education that this myriad of people and places seeks for its children. If the sprawling district has not responded always in kind, today there is a new dimension to its diversity, reflected in the substance and style of the programs offered to students and parents. Los Angeles is one of a growing number of school districts moving into a new era which recognizes that youngsters can often best be served by a greater variety of choices.

The Los Angeles school district, like many others of its size and structure, once was labeled a "closed system" because of the uniformity of its educational programs and its unresponsiveness to the calls for change emanating from the 1960s. Since those years of emerging educational innovation, when alternative schools and parent advisory councils first gained a foothold, the district has undergone a long and gradual evolution, transforming into something of a cornucopia of choices in education. If the district once was unyielding to pleas for diversity, it has come full circle to embrace that philosophy in much of its administration.

The System Opens Up

"The system has opened up," said Supt. Harry Handler. "There has been more parent participation. We are listening to parents and students, and we are allowing outside agencies and individuals to help us. There are many more opportunities today for creative programs in the district." A major reason for its transformation is Handler, who over the past decade has been instrumental in guiding the change, first as assistant superintendent in charge of instruction beginning in 1972 and as superintendent since 1981. Handler has unusual expertise and experience in the instructional side of district operations. For four years in the late 1960s, he helped develop new instructional programs at the Southwest Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Today, more than 100,000 students--nearly 20% of the children in grades 1-12--ride buses daily to take advantage of the choices and options available to them. They journey for voluntary integrated experiences, specialized programs at magnets and alternative schools, special education classes, vocational training, drop-out prevention classes and other options.

The range of offerings does seem remarkable--85 magnet schools spanning many curricular specialties and teaching approaches; occupational training at centers and businesses, days, evenings and on Saturdays; special classes for low achievers and the handicapped; and individualized courses for would-be dropouts and former students trying to resume their educational careers. For parents, participation in school activities has spread wider than ever with advisory councils at all district schools, numerous parent committees helping guide special programs and districtwide commissions of blacks, Mexican-Americans, Asian-Americans and American Indians which advise the school board on ethnic matters.

A Field of Magnets

The newest and biggest source of choice in the district is, of course, the magnet program, one of the largest in the nation. The Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies for students in fourth through 12th grades was the first to open after a state court approved the district's magnet program as a primary way to desegregate its schools in 1978. The themes of the magnets were selected on the basis of a districtwide survey of more than 10,000 parents. This year, the magnets enroll more than 24,000 students in elementary and secondary grades.

Magnets were designed primarily to attract students of all ethnic backgrounds to exceptional programs. In recent

years, they have added the goal of offering more educational options, although their enrollments still must be racially balanced. Magnets fall into two categories: one focuses on a curricular or subject specialty and the other emphasizes a particular teaching approach, learning style or pedagogical orientation. Typical of the curricular specialty are computer science, performing arts or business. The teaching approaches include alternative or unstructured, independent study and fundamental. All students in the magnets take the required course work necessary for promotion and graduation, and secondary students can satisfy entrance requirements at state universities in magnet classes. But the students also may explore beyond the basics and into areas of learning they enjoy most and want to delve into deeply.

The Animal and Biological Sciences Center, for example, is located at the Los Angeles Zoo for students in 10th through 12th grades who like animals and are interested in careers in allied fields. The Downtown Business High School draws youngsters for classes near the business and financial hub of the city. It emphasizes business, math and computer literacy and features a student-operated store, a business research library, modern word processors and other related equipment. Creative and critical thinking in all disciplines make up the core of instruction for students at the Los Angeles and Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies. The classes are multi-graded regardless of age.

The television and performing arts magnet at Bancroft Junior High School provides instruction in dance, drama, television production, script writing and music for seventh- through eighth-grade students. A college incentive program at eight high schools, split between the inner city and other minority areas of the district, encourages students to consider college study. Individual counseling and skills needed to succeed in college are emphasized. Each school has a cooperative relationship with a local university campus. Started in 1976, the Community School for students in grades K-9 was one of the first to stress integrated schooling; it also features an individualized curriculum of ethnic studies and human relations.

Strict standards in academic study, homework, behavior, dress and personal appearance characterize 14 fundamental schools, including nine elementary, four junior high and one for grades 4-9. Parents and students often must sign contracts agreeing to these standards. One of the schools, the fundamental/career awareness center, also exposes students to careers and skills needed in the everyday world of work. The King-Drew Medical Center High School, located at a postgraduate medical school next to an inner-city hospital, attracts students interested in careers in the medical and health professions. Students learn science through independent projects and are assigned responsibilities within the hospital.

Other magnet programs include:

- Computer science and mathematics
- Communication arts
- Gifted and high ability
- Highly gifted
- Health careers
- Individually guided education
- Math-science
- Multicultural/multilingual
- Enriched studies-music
- Performing and visual arts
- Technical occupations

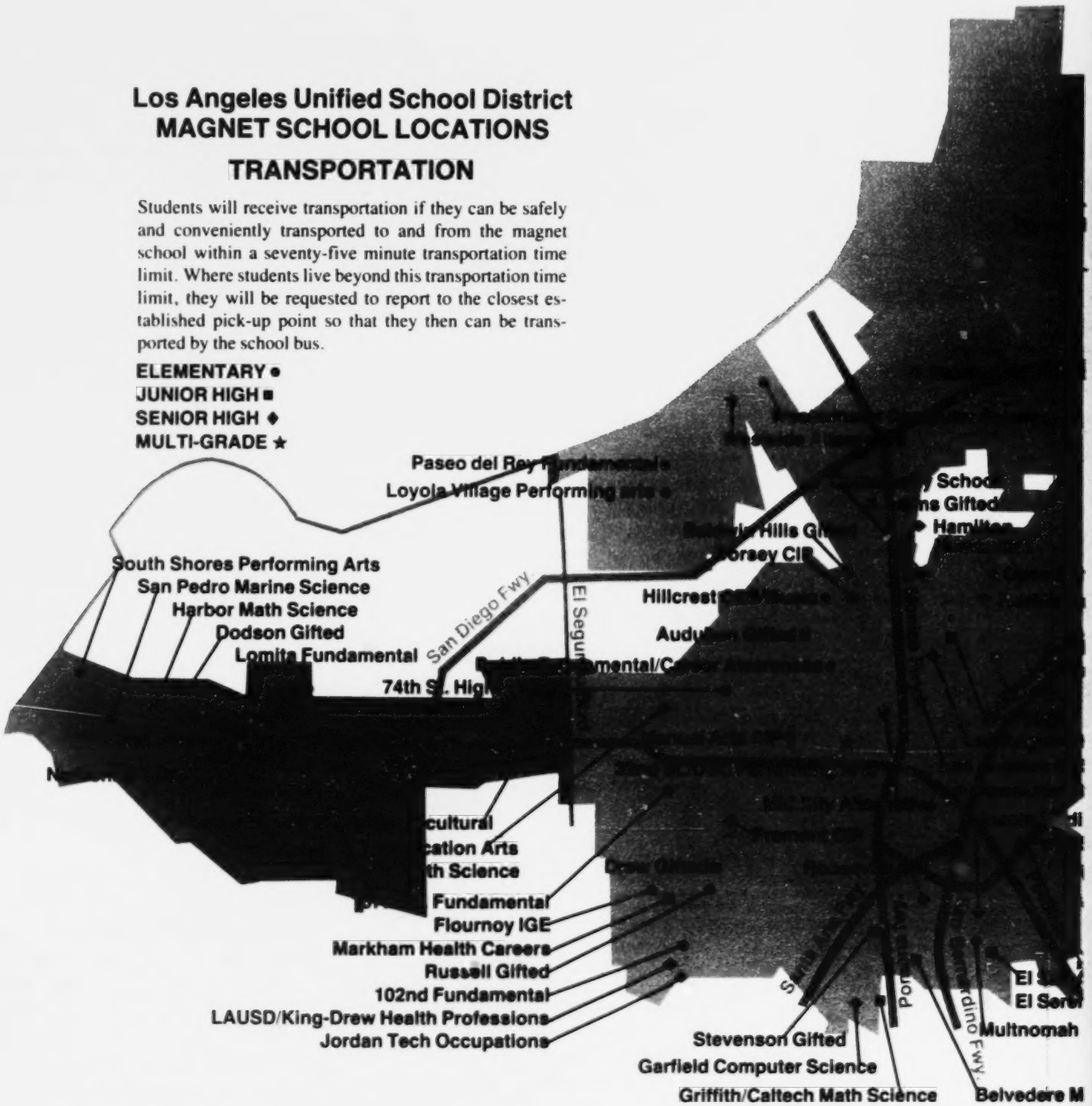
Demand Exceeds Supply

Clearly, these magnets greatly expand options for students, but do they satisfy them? In one way, no, said Handler. "Parents want more of what we have," he said, but the district lacks space in its highly overcrowded schools for more magnet programs. Waiting lists are long, especially for the performing and visual arts, enriched studies, math-science and computer science magnets. "We could easily enroll twice as many students in the magnets if we had the room," Handler said. However, a new Los Angeles County High School for the Arts, the region's first school devoted exclusively to the performing arts, was to open in September 1985 on the campus of California State U. and will be operated jointly by the district and other agencies. Another academic magnet serving the predominantly Hispanic section of the district is planned at East Los Angeles Community College.

One of the newest options for students in the district involves wholesale revamping of high school class schedules to allow students to attend high school in the morning, afternoon or night. The high school and adult school divisions have joined to offer classes needed for graduation at hours that fit the schedules of students who must work or meet family responsibilities to stay in school. Students will be able to work part of the day and go to school during the other part under the plan, which school officials hope will encourage students to remain in school. It was inaugurated by three high schools in September 1984 and was scheduled to be operating at all high schools by September 1985.

A new cooperative venture permits promising minority students to take university classes part-time at district expense. Developed by the district and the California State U. system, the program encourages minority students without funds or self-assurance to sample college classes in the 11th and 12th grades. The district also provides their transportation. About 350 students participated in 1984-85 and performed exceptionally well, Handler said. Both projects are part of his long-range program to offer more options for seniors, including choices in vocational fields, business and apprenticeships and academic specialization.

Another 150 students attend classes part-time at U. of California campuses under the gifted and talented program of the district. This program enrolls about 25,000 students at 600 school sites. Students receive cluster and individualized instruction in higher-level thought processes through activities selected by individual school teachers and parents.


Los Angeles Unified School District
MAGNET SCHOOL LOCATIONS
TRANSPORTATION
Students will receive transportation if they can be safely and conveniently transported to and from the magnet school within a seventy-five minute transportation time limit. Where students live beyond this transportation time limit, they will be requested to report to the closest established pick-up point so that they then can be transported by the school bus.
ELEMENTARY ●
JUNIOR HIGH ■
SENIOR HIGH ◆
MULTI-GRADE ★
Paseo del Rey
Loyola Village Performing
South Shores Performing Arts
San Pedro Marine Science
Harbor Math Science
Dodson Gifted
Lomita Fundamental
San Diego Fwy
El Segu
Hillcrest
Audu
74th St. High
Fundamental
Flournoy IGE
Markham Health Careers
Russell Gifted
102nd Fundamental
LAUSD/King-Drew Health Professions
Jordan Tech Occupations
Stevenson Gifted
Garfield Computer Science
Griffith/Caltech Math Science
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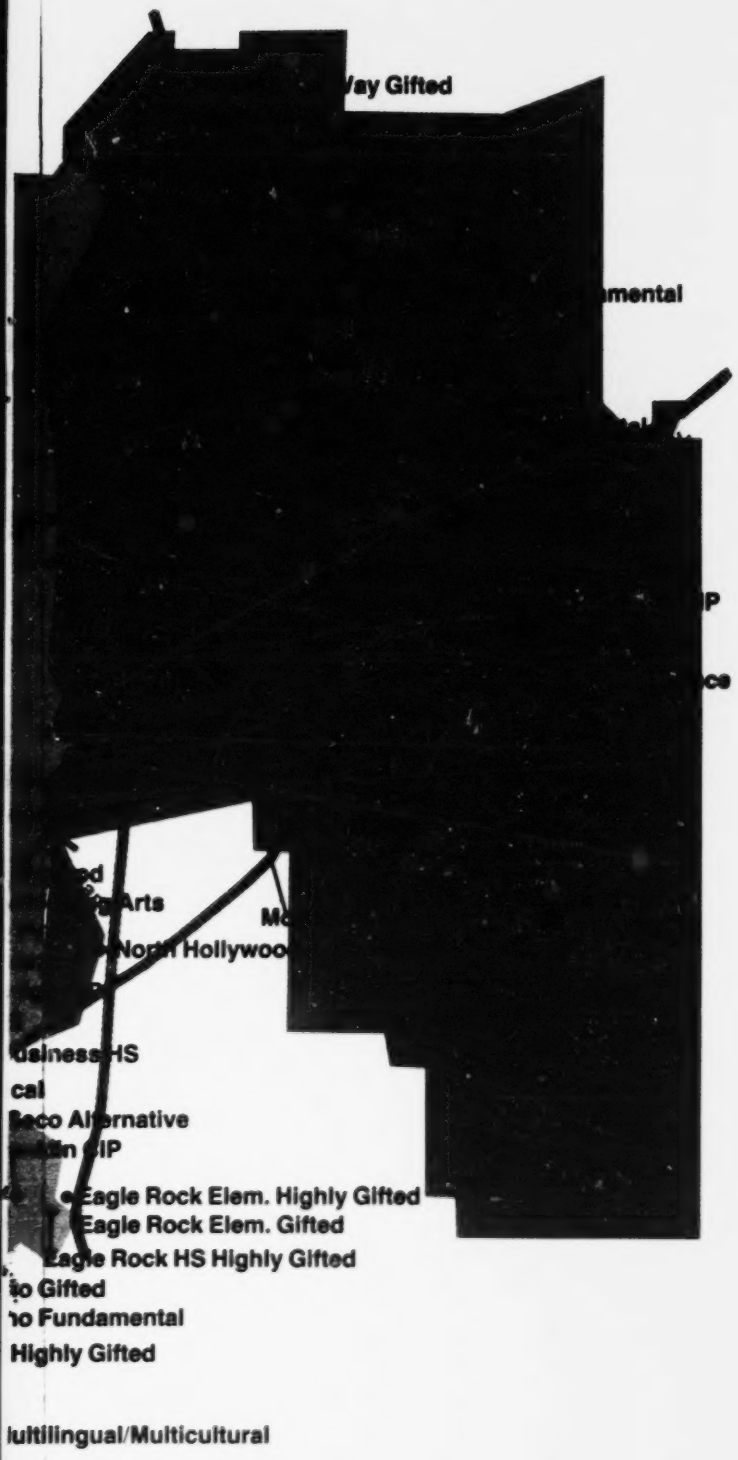

However, these are not just high-IQ students. In 1980 the district expanded its definition of gifted and talented to include students with outstanding achievement records, creative abilities, leadership assets and visual and performing arts talent.

Creative Search for the Gifted

In addition, the district has launched new efforts to identify pupils in primary grades with potential for talented and gifted programs, particularly those from low-income, limited-English or non-English-speaking and non-Anglo backgrounds. The program calls for the use of unconventional methods in first and second grades, such as communicating through mime to discover creativity and to nurture youngsters who might otherwise have been overlooked in screening for advanced classes.

There also are more than 4,000 students in Advanced Placement classes in high schools, which earn them college credit and/or special placement in college. The district recorded an 18% increase in AP class enrollments in 1984 and exceeded the national average in top scores among AP students.

More than 18,000 students learn vocational skills in the district's regional occupational programs at 40 of its 49 high schools and at five regional occupational centers. The campus programs offer advanced vocational training in business, medical, legal and other fields. The classes, held in afternoons and on Saturdays at about 125 businesses, provide students career training in the workplace. About 4,000 other students attend the district's six skills centers which feature job development and placement in medical technology, electronics and clerical fields. The intensive and short-term courses are targeted to fill existing job openings in private industry.

The two big federally funded programs for low-achieving and handicapped youngsters count a combined enrollment of 262,000. The Chapter 1 program provides remedial education ranging from small-group reading instruction to special counseling for 214,000 pupils, mostly elementary. The 48,000 children and adults in special education programs include babies as young as a few weeks old to adults up to 22 years of age. Many handicapped children as young as 3 receive services. Most handicapped students now attend regular classrooms, but others go to 18 special education centers in the district. Several hundred are taught either in hospitals or in their homes through a telephone network linking groups of students and a teacher. About 1,200 students go to 93 nonpublic schools, both nonprofit and proprietary, for specialized services not offered by the district. About 250 receive full-time custodial care in private institutions.

Another 10,000 students with problems ranging from poor attendance and low grades to suspensions and expulsions attend classes in the district's high school "Options Programs."

There are five components:

- Continuation schools, located in separate facilities on nearly all high school campuses, feature low student-teacher ratios, an informal instructional atmosphere and self-paced learning.
- Educational placement centers at eight locations, started two years ago, are designed for students involved in drug arrests on campuses and feature small-group instruction.
- Opportunity education programs in separate classes at most elementary and secondary schools deal with temporary problems involving absenteeism or discipline.
- School-age mother programs for pregnant junior and senior high school girls include regular instruction, classes in birth preparation and parenting and information on health and nutrition.
- Community-centered classrooms, started in 1978 on regular campuses and at other locations, are for expelled students with instruction similar to that of continuation schools plus extensive counseling.

With Help From Parents

The number of parent advisory councils in the Los Angeles system totals about 1,000, although the district lacks an exact figure. There are parent committees at each of the 644 regular schools, at the 289 Chapter 1 schools, at 70 regional occupational training centers and skills centers and at scores of schools participating in the state's School Improvement Program, which provides grants for reform projects. In addition, the district has parent advisory committees for programs such as special education, continuation schools and sex equity. Each administrative region of the district also maintains an advisory council of representatives from school councils, and Handler has a superintendent's advisory committee drawn from the regional councils.

The Los Angeles Board of Education mandated advisory councils at all schools in 1971, requiring 51% of the members to be parents elected from their communities. Other council members include the Parent-Teacher Assn., faculty and community representatives and, at the high school level, student representatives. Their duties are to "inquire, inform, support, recommend and evaluate" the school program. Sidney Thompson, who oversees the councils, said they "have worked very well" over the years, providing the district with a valuable source of feedback and critique on school operations and policies. Recently the district began evaluating school principals and other field administrators on the basis of the effectiveness of their parent councils. For the last three years, about 10,000 parents districtwide have been surveyed annually to find how they feel about school programs and how to improve them.

Other options are made possible by the district's own educational television station, which broadcasts instructional programming six hours a day for teachers to use with their classroom lessons. For example, two days a week basic math broadcasts allow outstanding math teachers to provide instruction via television, thus compensating for the shortage of well-trained math teachers. For five years, the district has offered summer driver's education and personal guidance courses for credit, and such elective courses as oceanography are beamed "live" during the regular school year to high schools. In 1984 the district began offering a "homework hotline" to help students with math and English homework. During the school year, the program averaged 600 calls a week from students needing assistance.

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Chapter 7

The Voucher Idea

Magnet/alternative/specialty schools and programs operated by school districts may be riding a wave of popularity across the nation, but the idea of choice in education doesn't stop there. Other, more unconventional ways are part of the landscape. One of these involves vouchers, a relatively old idea with recent new dimensions. Actually, some school districts have had reciprocal open enrollment policies, which serve the same purpose as vouchers, for a long time. These allow students to cross district lines to attend schools of their choice.

In several states, the push is on to expand the smattering of such options into statewide versions of these open-enrollment plans. Minnesota tried to become the first state to do so, with Gov. Rudy Perpich sponsoring a public-school voucher program in the legislature. A plan backed by Gov. Richard Lamm to give dropouts vouchers to attend schools outside of their district passed the Colorado legislature in the early summer of 1985. And the governor of Tennessee has promoted the use of vouchers to achieve more diversity in that state's public school system. Thus, the concept of a voucher plan involving only public schools is the newest and boldest variation of the choice idea to come along in the 1980s.

The voucher concept, of course, has been around a long time, but the idea of vouchers for public schools emerged only within the past few years. Voucher advocates are capitalizing on the nation's mood and are taking up where the open-enrollment concept of magnets leaves off. They are asking: why not let parents and students choose schools from all districts, not just from within the district where the child resides? They want all public schools within a state to be open to selection and for the state to fund the education of the student wherever he or she attends.

With only public schools participating, such a modified voucher plan eliminates perhaps the major objection to the original idea from the 1960s--the possible transfer of public funds to private religious schools attended by students with vouchers. The constitutional problem in using publicly funded vouchers at private schools never has been resolved, and many believe it won't be because of constitutional requirements of separation of church and state. By comparison, a public school voucher plan simply would make a state one big attendance area.

Arguments for Vouchers

Such a plan would afford "some fresh possibilities not often considered in contemporary education," according to Denis Doyle and Chester Finn Jr., two advocates. Doyle is director of education projects for the American Enterprise Institute. Finn is to become head of research and improvement programs at the U. S. Office of Education. They said it would contribute to "the enchancement of parental choice and the opportunity to create more educational diversity without sacrificing equality." In their 1983 National Institute of Education report, *Educational Quality and Family Choice: Toward a Statewide Public School Voucher Plan*, they contended that "higher quality education is more apt to result from a 'decentralized' system in which parents select the schools they want for their children and in which schools actively seek to attract students."

They view the present system as a "centralized bureaucracy that prides itself on uniformity and impersonality." Doyle and Finn acknowledged the risks involved--the chances that competition could "produce charlatans, deceptive advertising or chronic instability." But, they insisted, if the state sets "minimum standards" and requires compliance, abuses can be avoided. They admitted, however, that some kind of state bureaucracy would be necessary to administer the standards they propose.

This is an inviting time for public school vouchers to be enacted, Doyle and Finn maintain, because of what they consider an unmistakable trend toward state control of education and diminishing of local decisionmaking. The trend is marked by greater concentration of financing and policy-making authority at the state level, resulting from limitations on local tax rates, efforts to equalize funds available to districts and the current school reform movement, they said. In all cases, the states are assuming a greater funding role and

taking the leadership to increase uniform academic standards.

Between 1972-73 and 1982-83, the average state share of education financing rose from about 40% to more than 50%, Doyle and Finn pointed out. Virtually every state either has or plans significant school improvement mandates, which further consolidate such power in state capitals. In nearly every aspect of education, the "state is going to play a more and more dominant--and prescriptive and intrusive--role" in the foreseeable future, they said. This could mean the end of local control of schools, Doyle and Finn argued, but vouchers could ameliorate the trend.

The use of vouchers, they said, would enable families and individual schools to assume the power lost by local districts. It would rearrange the school governance structure "to eliminate an unnecessary middleman and to put the state more directly in touch with the service-delivery unit that must do its bidding, namely the individual school." They believe vouchers will give "new life to a doctrine of educational governance in the United States (i.e., local control) that is sickly and weak if not yet moribund."

The Minnesota Story

The state where general vouchers have gained the widest support is Minnesota. Perpich sponsored a bill permitting 11th and 12th grade students to attend public schools of their choice starting in 1986. Students in kindergarten through 10th grade would be allowed the same choice beginning in 1988. Perpich introduced his voucher idea in January of 1985 and fought hard for its passage in spite of strong opposition from teacher, administrator and school board groups. His plan, called "Access to Excellence," won the backing of a state citizens group, the business community, the state PTA and leading newspapers. The plan's theme combined less state regulation of schools and more accountability to parents through choice. It was defeated in a House subcommittee by only one vote, and narrowly lost in the Senate.

Even though Perpich's public school voucher plan was new, Minnesota has a long history of ferment and experimentation in education that led up to its introduction, said Ted Kolderie of the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the U. of Minnesota. Since the early 1970s, a public-private school voucher bill has been defeated in the legislature, a parochial-school aid plan was invalidated by the courts and a law providing parents with tax deductions for their children's education was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1983. In effect since 1955, the law allows state tax deductions for public or private schooling of up to $650 for each elementary student and $1,000 for each high school student.

These plans and other unorthodox education ideas surfaced in Minnesota despite its highly regarded public school system, which is well-financed and graduates a higher proportion of students than any other in the nation, Kolderie said. Yet, there has been growing belief that some kind of "structural change" is needed to bring about improvement to address the demands of education in the future, he added.

Launching of the Idea

In 1982, a leading Minnesota community organization declared the need for greater choice in education and endorsed vouchers as the way to achieve it. The Citizens League, a nonpartisan group, said the public school system "is in deep trouble" with "no real hope of dealing with an expanded, complex and technological future." The school system, it added, must be rebuilt to "give parents--who should be the key decision-makers in buying education--more choice in what to buy." To do so, "educational dollars should follow parents' choices about which schools or educational services to use," and "parents should be given vouchers, worth cash, to buy the educational services of the teachers they preferred." Kolderie said the Citizens League was "the first reputable public policy organization to bring along the choice idea on a different kind of ground."

That touched off a wide debate on vouchers. In 1983, the Minnesota Business Partnership, an association of chief executive officers of the state's top corporations, funded a $250,000 study by BW Associates of Berkeley, Calif., which also recommended vouchers. The 1984 report said there had been a "slow but steady erosion" of the quality of public schools in Minnesota as evidenced by declining test scores, expanded remedial courses in colleges, growing employer dissatisfaction with the skills of new employees and youngsters feeling "unchallenged and unfulfilled" by school. It proposed a sweeping reorganization of the schools, including mastery learning techniques, differentiated staffing, statewide testing, school-level decisionmaking and a modified public school voucher plan.

Under its plan, basic education would end in the 10th grade, and students in the 11th and 12th grades would be allowed to seek specialized education at any public school, state college or university, vocational/technical school or private institution. In grades seven through 10, students would be given the opportunity to take certain elective courses in other schools, other districts and private schools, such as language institutes. BW Associates estimated the redesign of the school system would cost about $300 million but predicted that amount would be more than offset by savings from projected lower enrollments in coming years. The overall impact would be a net savings of up to $82 million by 1994

Weighting the Vouchers

How would a public school voucher system work? A detailed answer will have to await the formal outline or actual operation of such a system. But Doyle and Finn tried to address some of the obvious questions in their report. One involves the value of a voucher. They said values must vary depending on "differences among categories of children" and called for "weighted" vouchers. The basic or average value would be established and then given additional value or weighting based on different requirements needed to achieve the educational goal for the child. For example, a child of normal intelligence and educational background would receive a basic voucher. Additional weighting or value would be added for other youngsters, such as those who speak little English or are handicapped.

Elected representatives at the state level would set those values. Of course, differential funding of education for various categories of students, such as low-achievers and the handicapped, already occurs. Florida has a type of weighted

when the entire plan would be phased in, the firm said. Its recommendations won the endorsement of the Business Partnership.

The Perpich Plan

Perpich wasted little time in seizing some key elements of the Business Partnership proposals for his plan: statewide testing, a sharp reduction in state mandates on schools, creation of two state magnet schools and vouchers--limited to public schools. He said his proposals would create clearer lines of accountability: to the state, for funding 80% of the cost of education compared to the present 63%; to school districts, for providing competitively attractive instruction; and to parents and students, for making informed decisions about education options. "Research shows," Perpich said, "that when families are permitted to select the public school of their choice, parents become more satisfied with the educational system, student attitude improves, teacher morale goes up and community support for public schools increases."

Perpich said no district would be required to participate in the voucher system, but if it decided to do so, it must accept all students who opt to attend its schools. State aid would go with the student, he made clear, and parents would pay for transportation up to the boundary of a district in which their child would be enrolled. The district would pay for transportation within its boundaries. Restrictions would be placed on districts under desegregation mandates to prevent further racial imbalance among students.

Education groups, however, have serious doubts that a voucher plan will improve schooling, and they suspect it could hurt it. They waged a united campaign against Perpich's plan, which they branded as an untested concept with too many uncertainties to be launched statewide. At least, it should be tried out on a limited scale, said Lloyd Nielsen, superintendent of the Roseville area schools near Minneapolis. These were the main arguments against the plan:

- It may be unconstitutional because state law prevents the use of funds earmarked for public schools to go for other purposes, such as college and university costs to educate 11th and 12th grade students.
- Many unanswered questions exist over funding and administration of vouchers.
- The plan is "elitist" because higher-income families would be more able to pay for the transportation involved and would be more likely to participate.
- Funding of vouchers is an indirect attempt by the business community to reduce the costs of public education.
- The plan would serve to undermine family life by allowing students to attend schools in widely scattered areas away from home.
- It would hurt small schools because students likely would transfer to larger districts with more diverse curricular programs and opportunities.

"It really doesn't deal with excellence for most students," Nielsen said. Most parents and students are satisfied with the public schools in the state, according to polls, which means the voucher plan would not improve education for the majority of students who likely would remain in their home schools, he said. Vouchers represent a "facade of excellence" when only a minority of schools would benefit from competition, Nielsen added. The plan also could produce segregation with more able and motivated students migrating to certain schools and others left in their neighborhood schools, he and others argue.

Thus, it is clear that even restricted to public schools, vouchers still create sharp controversy. It also is clear, however, that they have gained a wider following than the original private-public school voucher concept enjoyed. And the public plan is being more seriously considered than ever before. Perpich and his supporters have vowed to mount a campaign for passage of the voucher plan in 1986. He has substantial support behind him. A memo from L.W. Lehr, vice chairperson of the Business Partnership, indicated the struggle has just begun: "Let me make it clear that this will require efforts from a lot of people over a number of years--perhaps a decade or more--before we achieve the kind of (school) system that will truly do a better job for our young people."

funding system at present, they noted, and so do other states in varying degrees.

The individual school, rather than the school district, would be the governing unit under the voucher system conceived by Doyle and Finn. But how would it be constituted? The school should be accountable both to the community that sends children to the school and also to the "statewide public," they said. This means the governing body of the school should be elected by the parents of its students under rules and procedures established by the state. The result would be a large number of school boards--many more than now exist--so one alternative they suggest is to organize like-minded elementary, middle and high schools under an umbrella board of trustees for each group.

To make choices, consumers need good information, Doyle and Finn noted, and in a voucher system, that is especially important. Therefore, they recommended that each participating school be required to report on itself in a "common format about matters of general interest," which would be made widely available. For example, they say, the information should include the school's philosophy, objectives, standards, rules and regulations, planned income and expenditures, faculty qualifications and so forth. The state would prescribe the reporting format to enable comparisons among schools, and state authorities would perform "spot checks" to "discourage schools from inflating or falsifying their claims."

Doyle and Finn recognized that districts perform necessary administrative functions for schools, such as the acquisition and coordination of goods and services. They suggested replacing school districts with regional centers to provide such services to individual schools. But the relationship should be voluntary, and these centers should have no administrative or legal control over the individual schools, they stressed.

Under State Control

Any school--new or existing--that "satisfies the state's compulsory attendance laws" would be eligible to participate in the voucher system. That would encompass public schools currently operating and any others that were formed. Such schools would be subject to all state laws enacted to administer public education, they said. Doyle and Finn acknowledged that a voucher school system might be burdened with the same maze of bureaucratic rules and regulations now hampering school districts. Yet, if the voucher schools are to be public schools, the state must exercise state control. "Though we very much hope that the state will not overspecify--inasmuch as diversity among schools is the hallmark of the scheme--it has no business channeling public funds into the coffers of institutions that will not be accountable to the public," they said.

Voucher schools could and should compete among each other in almost every way but price, they said. "The school may not charge a student more than his voucher nor can it charge less (and offer a rebate)." To make the system work, all schools must agree to educate their students for the amount of the voucher which the child carries. As far as admissions, Doyle and Finn proposed voucher schools be allowed to accept students on the basis of entrance standards such as test scores and grades and be allowed to retain or expel students according to performance standards, both academic and behavioral.

On the one hand, they said schools must be able to establish entrance criteria so they may become distinctive and diverse. The state, however, needs to ensure that students have reasonable access to schools, they added.

In urban areas, this should not pose problems because "the voucher system itself creates a 'market' in which the demand for schooling...will create a supply," they said. Disadvantaged and handicapped youngsters will carry vouchers of additional value to encourage schools to enroll them. A problem could develop in rural areas where the numbers of students and schools are smaller. Doyle and Finn proposed such remedies as extra-value vouchers to encourage mini-schools or branch campuses of urban schools in rural areas, transportation vouchers, boarding schools or a requirement that schools in rural areas must accept all applicants from a school's surrounding area. They said all students in a system should receive transportation vouchers to pay for incurred costs. Some urban districts, such as New York City and Los Angeles, already do this on a limited basis, and some remote rural districts have similar arrangements.

"It is the parents and students who have the most important responsibility of all. They are the ones who must demand quality. They should have the right to choose the program which best fits their individual needs."

Gov. Rudy Perpich of Minnesota, in outlining his voucher plan, "Access to Excellence."

A Voluntary Plan

Would all public schools be forced to participate in such a voucher school system? No, said Doyle and Finn. "We suggest that any community that prefers to retain 'its own' public school system in its current form should be exempted from the voucher scheme and allowed to continue claiming whatever state funds it already receives under present terms and procedures." But residents of districts that decline to participate would not be entitled to use school vouchers, and the state would not assume the full costs of education in those districts, as it would for students under a voucher plan. Doyle and Finn said they assume "state taxes would have to increase

to pay for a statewide education voucher system," but the "net effect...will be to reduce tax burdens."

Local tax revenues now going to education would be available for other uses because the state would assume more of the costs. However, by setting standard values of vouchers for children in similar categories, the state would eliminate the differences in per-pupil spending that now exist among districts. For example, the substantial difference spent for the education of average pupils in the high-spending Beverly Hills and low-spending Compton districts in California would be wiped out. Such an equalization of spending within states could be the most drastic outcome of all for school vouchers.

Doyle and Finn argued that educational choices offered by vouchers "will in time lead to greater satisfaction than most families currently glean from the education system, and the satisfaction will in most cases be an honest result of higher quality schooling." But others disagree.

A South Dakota Choice

South Dakota has approved another variation on the voucher theme. With mainly rural school districts, the state has passed a law allowing students in high schools with fewer than 45 students to transfer to other districts at state expense. Twenty of the 194 public high schools have less than 45 students. Almost half have less than 100 students. A spokesperson for Gov. Bill Janklow said the governor proposed the plan "because he believes students in that type of situation should have a choice." Under the Family Option Law, parents may send students to an adjacent school district with the state paying the tuition of about $2,800. The law may not be implemented immediately, however, because advocates of the smaller schools are seeking to have the issue placed on the November 1986 ballot.

The Arguments Against

Scott Thomson, executive director of the National Assn. of Secondary School Principals, concedes that as a "political strategy," public school vouchers are more attractive than other plans involving private schools or tuition tax credit. However, "as a strategy to improve the quality of schooling or increase responsiveness to citizens," they make little sense, he says. Thomson believes proponents "vastly oversimplify the funneling of dollars to individual students" and "ignore the erosion of public policy control over schools under the voucher system." He contends it would be virtually impossible to attach fair value to vouchers for various groups of students. As it now stands, "no school spends the same amount on each student." Schools subsidize the education of students who cost more to serve by enrolling others who need fewer services and are less costly to educate.

Thomson fears that under a voucher system, "every school would recruit the college-bound student with good grades because not only are they the easiest to educate, they are also the least expensive to educate." At the same time, few schools would seek to balance their rolls with those more expensive to educate, he adds.

Thomson also insists that rather than enhancing local control, vouchers would erode it. Parents would have total control over the education of their children and the general citizenry none. If education is "viewed as an economic and social investment which benefits the general society, and that the citizen at large has a critical interest in the public schools, then a virtual monopoly of school policy (by parents) is inadequate," he said. There must be a sharing of public and parental interests, Thomson emphasized.

Governors Back Vouchers

Yet there seems to be growing support for public school vouchers in spite of the pitfalls and unknowns. Deregulation is in the air, and the governors of at least three states think applying that principle to public education is a good idea. They are Gov. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, Gov. Richard Lamm of Colorado and Gov. Rudy Perpich of Minnesota. All believe, Finn said, that "a well-designed education marketplace might better serve children, parents, taxpayers and even teachers than do the cumbersome bureaucracies and uniformities of the present system." These three governors are going beyond the typical school reforms being enacted by the states, which mostly conform to recommendations of the various national reports, and are seeking more fundamental change.

Alexander said parents need more options than the schools now or would provide after the current wave of reform has ended. "If we really want the best schools," he said in a state-of-the-state address early in 1985, "we need to get parents--and volunteers--more involved in each child's edu-

"It is not enough for voucher advocates to espouse the virtues of competition, efficiency and choice. They must be prepared to explain how schools under vouchers will accommodate the states' goals effectively, efficiently and equitably. They must be prepared to explain how we will not recreate an even more onerous regulatory apparatus over schools."

—Arthur E. Wise and Linda Darling-Hammond, "Education by Voucher: Private Choice and the Public Interest," *Educational Theory* (Winter 1984).

cation." And "the best way to increase parent involvement is to let parents choose the public school--not the private--but the public school their child attends." Alexander did not propose a voucher plan per se but is encouraging more Tennessee school districts to permit students to cross district lines to attend schools (some districts already allow this practice). "My goal is for every local school board to begin thinking now of ways to let parents choose the public schools their children attend," the governor said.

In Colorado, Lamm's original "second chance" program would have allowed high school dropouts to attend any accredited public or private non-sectarian school under a voucher-type system. The final bill limits the voucher plan to public schools and puts severe restrictions on it--but it is a beginning.

"It (choice within public schools) is essential. By the 1990s we should try to let all parents choose the public school their child attends, even across school district lines.... Letting parents choose schools will get parents more involved in their own child's education. And the more parents do, the more good a good teacher can do."

—Gov. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, *Footnotes*, Spring 1985.

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Chapter 8

Unconventional Choices

The pursuit of choice in education has begun to take on novel new shapes and forms, which, although still in their infancy, some day could challenge the dominance of public schools. They range from entrepreneurial-type concepts modeled on the changing lifestyles of parents to a highly unorthodox medium that could transcend both school district and state boundaries if its futuristic vision comes to pass.

Choice also turns up in such unconventional modes as magnet residence schools, drop-out centers run by school districts, before and after-school programs for "latchkey" children and even cooperative arrangements between public and private schools. Yet, even these instances do not exhaust the notion of diversity developing in education.

Some are calling for "work-based" education of children in schools near their parents' place of employment, and sociologist James Coleman wants companies to organize schools for their employees' children. On the horizon is the prospect of the electronic classroom in the home with instruction transmitted via cable television and/or computers. Will this "video learning" be furnished by public or private means? No one is venturing a guess. The questions of regulation and role within the educational process have not even been formulated, much less addressed, as of now. But it is becoming obvious that the idea of choice, if allowed to evolve unfettered, knows no limit--at least none that can yet be glimpsed.

Vouchers Already in Practice

Crossing school district boundaries is a focus of the current debate over public school vouchers, but in at least three states it is commonplace. Since the 1890s Vermont has allowed students to go outside the district in which they live to attend other public or private schools. About 95 of the 246 towns in Vermont permit out-of-district attendance, according to a report by Joe Nathan in *Phi Delta Kappan*. The state gives town boards authority to use tax funds to pay tuition at either public or private high schools if they do not maintain their own high schools. To receive tuition for such students, private schools must meet certain state requirements covering academic standards, record-keeping and evaluations. The result is a diverse menu of choices for parents, said Nathan, who is a teacher in St. Paul, Minn., and author of *Free to Teach: Achieving Equity and Excellence in Schools*.

The choices range from traditional academy-type programs to an emphasis on learning to ski, vocational interests or personalized instruction. The situation is similar in Maine, Nathan said, where more than 30 Maine towns without high schools permit students to attend other public, private or parochial schools with tuition paid by the home towns. "We never called them voucher plans, but they serve the same purpose," said Richard Redmon, Maine's deputy commissioner of education.

In Tennessee, a recent survey showed about 40% of the state's school districts allow students to attend any school within the district, and 31% permit students to go to any district within the county. Although the practice has existed more than 10 years, "we were all shocked" at its extent, said an official of the Tennessee Dept. of Education, which conducted the survey. In some cases, parents pay tuition, but most do not. State aid for the students goes to the district where the student is enrolled. Of the state's 143 districts, 28 draw at least 10% of their students from outside their area, and 34 draw more than 6%. Robert McElrath, state commissioner of education, said, "There is more opportunity now than many parents might think. The school boards that offer a choice find that parents develop more interest in their children's schools, and that academic standards tend to be higher."

Acton, Mass., began an open enrollment plan in 1970. Students can attend any one of the district's four elementary schools, which have educational themes ranging from basic skills to unstructured classrooms. The parents of new students are provided with information on each of the schools with which to decide where their children will attend.

Accommodating the Family

The thinking behind such open-enrollment plans is that the child may seek out and attend the educational program that draws his/her interest. Why not make that consideration one of family convenience? That is the rationale of work-based education, which calls for children to attend school near their parents' employment. In such a situation, the parent is able to spend time with the child traveling to and from work, is close by and more likely to become involved with the school and is available in case of need or emergency. Neighborhood school attendance "no longer holds for a growing number of American families," said E. Gareth Hoachlander and Susan Choy in *Work-based Attendance: A New Approach to Expanding Parental Choice in Education*, a study done for the National Institute of Education. They pointed out that well over half of all married women with school-age children now work away from the home, and that "social networks" which used to revolve around the neighborhood are more likely to be centered on the workplace. Such arrangements likely would supplement existing neighborhood schools, which most parents might continue to prefer, but "for many families and for many areas, work-based attendance offers the exciting prospect of...expanding parental choice in education," they said.

With most work hours starting before and extending after the times that schools are in session, some kind of day care is necessary to make a work-attendance plan feasible. Coincidentally, school-age day care is a field of potentially explosive growth. The demand for day care services is skyrocketing and promises to become one of the major issues in education in the late 1980s. Parents' demands for quality care for their children before and after school are related integrally to the rising number of working mothers and single-parent families and the pressures on them to provide for their youngsters while on the job. Estimates of school-age children between the ages of 5 and 13 who are unsupervised after school range from 1.8 million to 7 million. Those figures may be low, however, because many parents are embarrassed to admit their children are receiving inadequate care.

Day care is, however, an educational option of vital importance to both parents and schools. Demand for day care now far exceeds availability, but if expansion of such services continues, the situation soon may become one of choice of type, location and quality. The demand is growing so intense that governments, corporations and community groups are being forced to respond. States such as New York and California are developing multi-million dollar programs to provide school-age and other day-care services for parents. Many school districts are cooperating with community groups to make their buildings available for such programs. Private agencies and non-profit groups are renting unused school facilities. Also, day-care initiatives have become a new funding interest of Congress.

Private Sector Moves

Possibly the biggest overall source of support may be the private sector where there is growing recognition that adequate day care is critical to workers' performance. Recently, for example, the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network announced what it called a major breakthrough in corporate funding, with donations of $400,000 toward a $700,000 goal to create day-care centers throughout the state. The funding from a consortium of corporate foundations, including Bank of America and Chevron, was hailed as the largest of its kind in the national drive for improved child-care services.

Day-care programs are likely to continue springing up--as they are now--at businesses, private schools, nonprofit agencies and churches. Many authorities, however, believe the public schools remain the most desirable and logical providers because of their knowledge and experience in working with children. Faced with competing demands for their funds and uncertainties over laws and their roles in child care, schools have hesitated to take on the responsibility. But if the day-care phenomenon continues to build and funds materialize, as expected, the public schools likely will find themselves in the midst of the biggest new option of all. Early childhood advocates, already with a wide network of services and professional development, see some problems of compatability with public school programs, but the dialogue has begun between the two sectors.

Organizing education of children around the workplace to also is advocated by U. of Chicago sociologist James Coleman place schools in a "functional community," which he claims neighborhoods no longer are. Establishing schools for employees of individual companies would make the workplace "the modern-day equivalent of what residential communities were in the past," he says. He has called for experimental programs to test the idea. More interaction among parents and discussion of issues such as education exist at work than in neighborhoods, Coleman says. Company schools also would be more egalitarian than neighborhood schools because children of employees would reflect the varied class and racial makeup of the workforce, he explains. These new schools would have little of the neighborhood segregation which so often produces racial imbalance in the public schools.

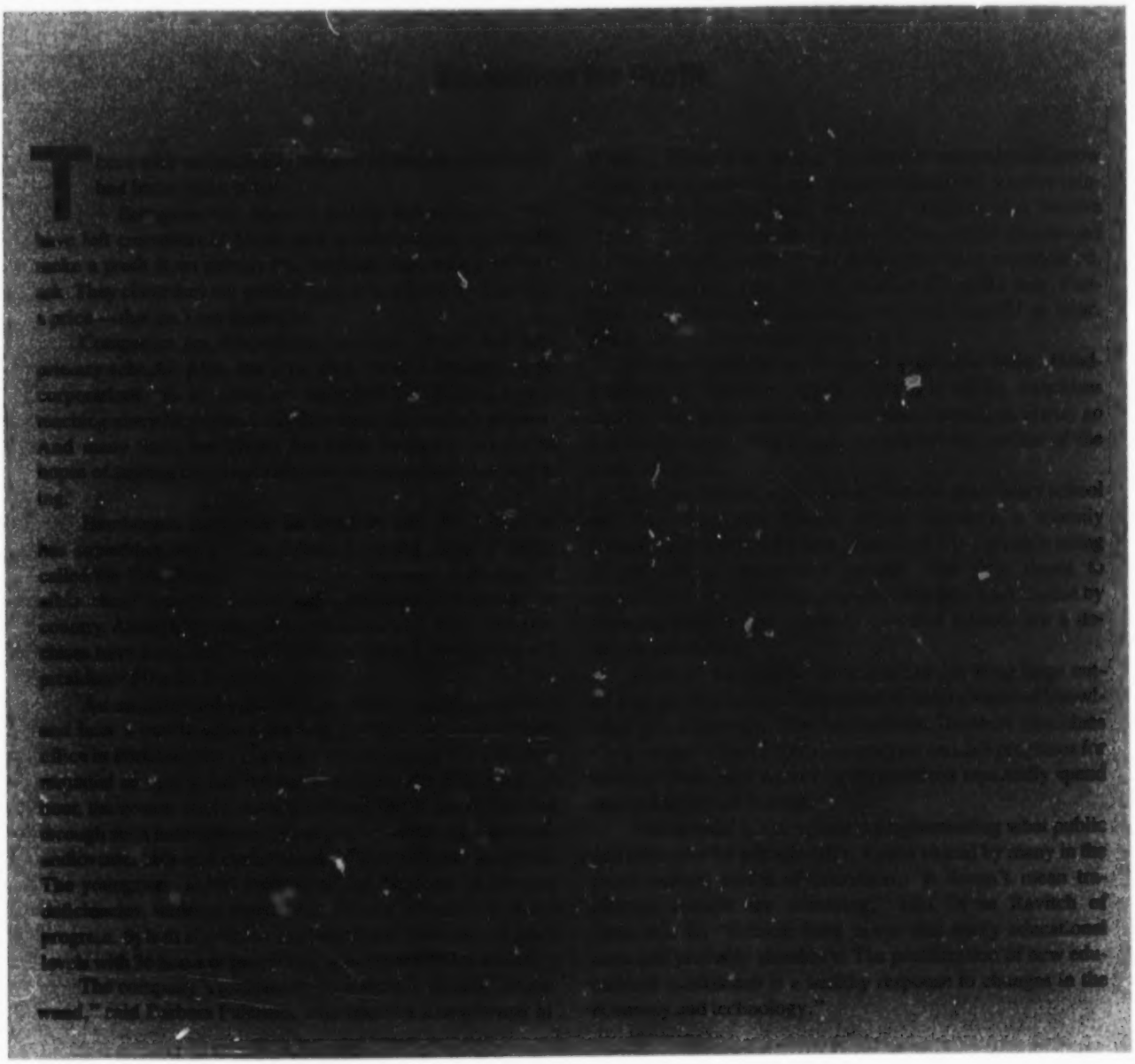
Residential Choices

Another new option in education is the residential magnet school, which two states--North Carolina and Louisiana--have started in recent years. The North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics became a public residential high school in 1980, drawing about 400 of the state's top 11th- and 12th-grade students. It costs the state about $7,000 a year to educate each of the students at the 27-acre campus in

Durham, almost three times the statewide per-pupil expenditure. Private companies have contributed more than $7 million to help run the school. The students are selected through a highly competitive screening process that relies on academic records, personal interviews and recommendations to identify able as well as creative individuals, with some attention to geographic and racial balances.

The students are taught by a top-flight faculty, many with advanced degrees, and students also may study with faculty at several nearby universities. In addition to their advanced and specialized courses in math and science, students must take a normal load of courses in other high school subjects. However, the social life at a residential school can be difficult for students, most of whom have never lived away from home. To ease the transition, the school provides resident advisers in dormitories and offers numerous extracurricular activities. Students also must do chores to help run the school and perform community service several hours a week. For their part, the school's teachers also advise students and assist the state's other public schools in strengthening math and science instruction.

The Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts opened in 1983 and graduated its first senior class in 1985. It also boards 11th- and 12th-grade students in what director Robert Alost calls a "living/learning environment." Located in a refurbished high school on the campus of Northwestern State U. in Natchitoches, the school now has 400 students and hopes to grow to a maximum of 700 in a few years. The



students come from 62 of the state's 64 parishes, are selected through a highly competitive process and also receive a free education. The per-pupil cost at the school is about $6,000 (compared to a statewide average of about $2,500 for high school students), but the $6,000 figure includes start-up costs and will decline sharply in the future, a school official said.

Students major in one of three areas--math/science, humanities or creative and performing arts. The curriculum, taught by 43 teachers, 32 of whom hold doctoral degrees or the equivalent, includes many advanced courses which are supplemented by guest speakers, field trips to as far away as Europe and access to the university's faculty and resources, The high school itself has new laboratories and computer equipment. Alost said the students who enroll have been in advanced programs before but are "looking for something more: a total-immersion experience where they can be with their intellectual peers and have constant opportunities for learning." At the schools they left, these high-achieving students may have felt "different," Alost said, but at the residential school "they fit in and belong."

Choices for Dropouts

Alternative-type programs, long designed for students who need or want something different in education, now are being adapted for youngsters requiring a radical approach to get them back in school. The dropout is the focus of a new program in Washington, D.C., and in a statewide network of alternative schools in Iowa.

The District of Columbia school, named Options--A School for New Skills, enrolls about 240 students ranging in age from the teens to the mid-30s. Most dropped out in junior high school and are unemployed. The school, which opened in 1984, is located in the Capital Children's Museum and combines academic and functional approaches. The curriculum is based on the Comprehensive Competencies Program developed by the Remediation and Training Institute of Alexandria, Va. It has roots in the Job Corps but also covers regular academic subjects. The functional part teaches "survival skills," such as techniques for obtaining jobs. Students like it because they can work at their own pace. The school respects the students and expects the same in return, demanding regular attendance and good behavior, say its organizers. Some students have remarked that "it's the first time they've been treated like human beings," one official said.

In Iowa, alternative schools for dropouts have grown rapidly within the last five years, reaching 50 in number statewide. Almost all urban school districts, which have most of the state's dropouts, now provide such an alternative program, said Raymond Morley of the state Dept. of Public Instruction. The dropout rate in Iowa has declined somewhat, partly due to the new alternative approach, Morley said. The main reason students drop out is that they "personally dislike their experience with the school they are attending," Morley said, so the alternative program represents an attempt to try something different. It has been promoted by state school Supt. Robert Benton, and the state legislature for the last two years has provided local districts with more budgeting flexibility to make it easier to finance such programs. In nearly all the alternative schools, "the student can put as much or as little pressure upon himself/herself to complete the needed competencies to graduate," Morley said. "A matter of choice exists."

Most of the alternative schools are open between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m., and about a third also offer classes at night. Most are housed in separate facilities such as churches, storefront centers, houses and community colleges, as well as schools. The student-teacher ratio is about the same as that in regular schools, but the counselor-student ratio in alternative schools is much lower. However, costs of alternative programs are generally about the same as regular schools, Morley said.

All the alternative programs stress parent involvement; participation of students, parents and teachers in establishing discipline codes; and student counseling. Forty-six of the 50 programs use an individually guided approach to instruction and many emphasize "community studies," which link academic studies to the operations of government, careers, vocations or businesses. Most of the programs also use independent study or contracts which allow students to earn credit for studying on their own initiative.

Public/Private Cooperation

In West Hartford, Conn., diversity in education takes the form of cooperation and collaboration between the public and private schools. It is the brainchild of Peter Relic, superintendent in West Hartford. He advocates a system of "communication and cooperation among all of us who are interested in quality education," which involves both public and private schools. This cooperation can better produce "choice and access" to good education for all students, he said. To achieve this, he urges public and private schools to establish a "network of confident communication between suburban districts and independent schools." In West Hartford, Relic said, the idea has been put into practice in these ways:

- A grant from the Dodge Foundation of New York has been used to offer advanced language and math classes for private and public school students and joint inservice programs for their teachers. For example, students from Northwest High School, a parochial school, attend calculus classes at Hall High School, a public school, which has too few students interested in the subject to justify the class by itself.
- The private Watkinson School offers writing workshops for its teachers and those from the West Hartford schools with a grant that also pays substitutes to give the teachers time off for the classes.
- Student councils from West Hartford and area private schools meet regularly together and develop their own

plans for cooperative activities.

- West Hartford for four years has held a holiday basketball tournament for public and private high schools.

Relic also urges other, broader joint ventures between public and private schools, such as:

- An association among public school superintendents and private school headmasters within local areas to plan cooperative endeavors.
- Inservice staff development among public, private and parochial schools within or among school districts.
- The sharing of locally developed curricula.
- Exchanging teachers for observation, inservice and even teaching specialized courses.
- Creation of private-public athletic leagues and other competition among debate and mathematics teams between the two sectors.
- Joint volunteer services among students for the benefit of communities.
- Discussions by school boards and private trustees, parent-teacher associations and public and private support groups to explore a common agenda.

Relic said communication and cooperation between public and private schools have too much to offer students for such opportunities to be ignored.

Choices in the Sky

Almost beyond imagination, there is another dimension to diversity in education, which Dale Mann of Teachers College, Columbia U., calls "the gathering revolution in electronic learning." Much more than private schools or tuition tax credits or vouchers, he said, "the most serious threat to the continuation of the American public school may be the school in the sky," i.e. televised education. He envisions such programming to be "delivered by satellite to subscribing homes beginning in late afternoon" and, when developed with depth and sophistication, to become "a totally engineered learning environment." Mann noted in an article in *Educational Leadership* (October 1984) that 43 million homes are wired for cable reception. Basic cable subscriptions cost about $9.50 a month. If cable learning catches on, he said, and it becomes fashionable to be part of the new "home education" audience, "we can easily see how much curriculum development money can be raised quickly by the private sector."

This could signal the beginning of a whole new enterprise in education, unlike anything yet experienced. "When profit motives and technology chase each other in this society, things happen," Mann said. "Corporate America is not going to ask school boards or state departments (of education) for permission as this curriculum is developed." It is likely to be developed "by our best and brightest classroom teachers bought away by the private sector," he said, which raises the question: "Who will be left to keep the public school from being more than a shadow of its former self?"

Mann doubts anyone is noticing this gathering revolution on the horizon. "One can search the existing players in vain for concerted and thoughtful action," he said. Federal policy has not even begun to address this new technology, Mann said, and perhaps it cannot because it is so unprecedented. "The question here," Mann observed, "is less whether we educators think this is a problem than whether venture capitalists think it is an opportunity."

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Chapter 9

Private Schools: An Enrollment Saga

One of the jolting statistics to come out of education in the 1970s signaled an upturn in private school enrollments at mid-decade. It reversed a long decline in these enrollments and almost overnight seemed to resurrect private schools as a serious option for parents seeking alternatives for their children's education. Many viewed the resurgence of interest in private schools as the beginning, at least potentially, of a long-term trend that could pose a serious threat to the vitality of the nation's public school system. The public schools were already under fire and as criticism of their performance mounted, the growth of private school attendance underscored the consequences of disenchantment with the public schools and raised the specter of a major public-to-private shift.

Today, 10 years later, it is clear the rise in private school enrollments represented more than a passing phenomenon. Private schools are steering a new upward course, in contrast to the decline of the postwar years up to 1975. Ten years of enrollment figures and better information-gathering also provide a clearer picture of the growth and where it may be heading.

While the growth of private schools has been impressive, it has not--according to one new perspective--made great inroads into public school enrollments. Some argue that private school expansion may be leveling off, indicating the surge could be running out of steam.

What the experts are interested in--and will be watching intently--is where private enrollments go in the next few years. They may be at a critical juncture because it is not yet clear their new growth can be sustained. Further, conditions that prompted their turn-around may have changed. The public schools have not stood idle, as much of this report shows. The range of choices and options for students and parents widened within public schools over the past decade. If private schools represented new competition in the 1970s, the public schools responded with competitive programs of their own in the 1980s.

New Calls for Private Choice

There are other reasons why private school growth gained attention. They provide an added alternative to students and parents seeking education that fits their tastes in emphasis, style and philosophy. Few would argue that the wider the choice, the better--within limits. The new interest in school financing proposals also embraces private schools. Bruce Cooper of Fordham U. said this interest has been "provoked by the Reagan administration's avowed reliance on private choice, initiative and enterprise." The mood of the country has for some time been warming to what Cooper called "proposals emphasizing private-sector delivery of human services," which "can lead logically to an emphasis on private schooling." From this emphasis on private-sector competition have come the voucher and tuition tax credit ideas designed "to strengthen parental choice in education," he wrote in the *Teachers College Record* (Fall 1983). Exploration of these proposals has been fed by "the conviction of some that public schools have deteriorated to such a degree that private action is required," he said.

Parents seeking to use private schools would benefit, of course, by such financing, but what would it cost taxpayers? Vouchers would channel funds away from public schools, and tax credits for tuition could produce a net loss in government revenues, depending on the size and nature of private school enrollments. "The cost of aid schemes as diverse as tuition tax credits, tuition vouchers and textbook loans would be expected to vary directly with the size of the eligible private school population," said James Catterall of UCLA. He analyzed the impact of such plans for a symposium on public and private schools at the Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance, Stanford U.

Future costs would depend on private school enrollments, Catterall said, while the availability of such schools, undoubtedly affected by government policy, would influence parental decision on where to enroll their children. "So

we must know who attends private schools--children living where, and with what backgrounds, and attending what types of schools--to know something of the pattern of benefits of proposed policies," he said.

As of 1983, the latest year for which figures are available, private school enrollments had reached an estimated 5.25 million, according to Cooper and Catterall. (The National Center for Education Statistics in the U.S. Dept. of Education estimates 5.7 million students in private schools, but most authorities regard these estimates as inflated, in part because NCES tends to count preschool pupils in the overall totals.) The 5.2 million represents about 12.3% of all K-12 students. Since 1975, when enrollment in private schools hit a low of 4.6 million, private school enrollment increased 14% over an eight-year period. The number of children decreased 14% in all U.S. schools and 17% in public schools during the same period. The proportion of students in private schools rose from 9.3% in 1975 to 12.3% in 1983. So it is plain that private schools have made important gains since 1975, compared to prior losses. Cooper said "private initiatives in education are alive and thriving," and Catterall agreed there is a definite trend. "Our data indeed show an increase in the fraction of American youngsters choosing private schools," he said.

Catholic Enrollment Swings

Where did the growth occur? Cooper found increases across the board. True, between 1965 and 1983, Roman Catholic schools dropped in number from 13,292 to 9,432 and in enrollments from about 5.5 million to slightly more than 3 million. These are sizable declines--29% in the number of Catholic schools and 46% in the number of students. (Elementary Catholic schools lost 50% of their students over this period.) But Cooper, who examined changes in private schools in several regions, believes "this trend may have been reversed recently." Catholic schools have lost fewer than 100,000 students since 1980, a much slower trend than earlier declines, and they "may actually be moving ahead" now, he said. Catholic elementary schools experienced the sharpest upturns and, overall, Cooper estimates "real net gains have been recorded for the last three or four years," which may not have been reflected in other figures.

However, the most explosive growth is occurring among non-Catholic private schools. All groups, including Lutheran, Jewish, Seventh Day Adventist and Episcopal schools, reflect this trend, but leading the way are the evangelical Christian schools. Opening at the rate of one per day, according to Christian school leaders, their numbers alone have shot up 165% since 1980 to an estimated enrollment of 913,000--a ninefold increase since 1965. They now rank second only to Catholic schools in size and are the key reason non-Catholic enrollments jumped 179% over the last 15 years.

"These fundamentalist schools constitute perhaps the most dynamic of all private school trends," according to Cooper. Considering this turnaround in private school rolls, "there can be little doubt that the diversification and expansion of private education in the U.S. signals a change," Cooper said in a paper for the Stanford U. symposium. It means, he added, that "many more families have local options for educating their children: religious, social and academic. Private schooling is now virtually ubiquitous."

Different Views of Future

And what of the future? Catholic schools will record increases, Cooper predicted. Non-Catholic Christian enrollment expansion will continue to be robust, he said, representing a "broad-based, energetic, grassroots attempt by families, religious congregations and individuals to provide a special kind of schooling for children" and providing "a range of educational choice as never before." By 1990, Cooper estimated private school enrollment will hit 5.95 million or 15% of all school-age children.

From a different perspective, Catterall pointed out that even with the growth since 1975, private schools still are far behind their peak levels of the mid-1960s. "Present enroll-

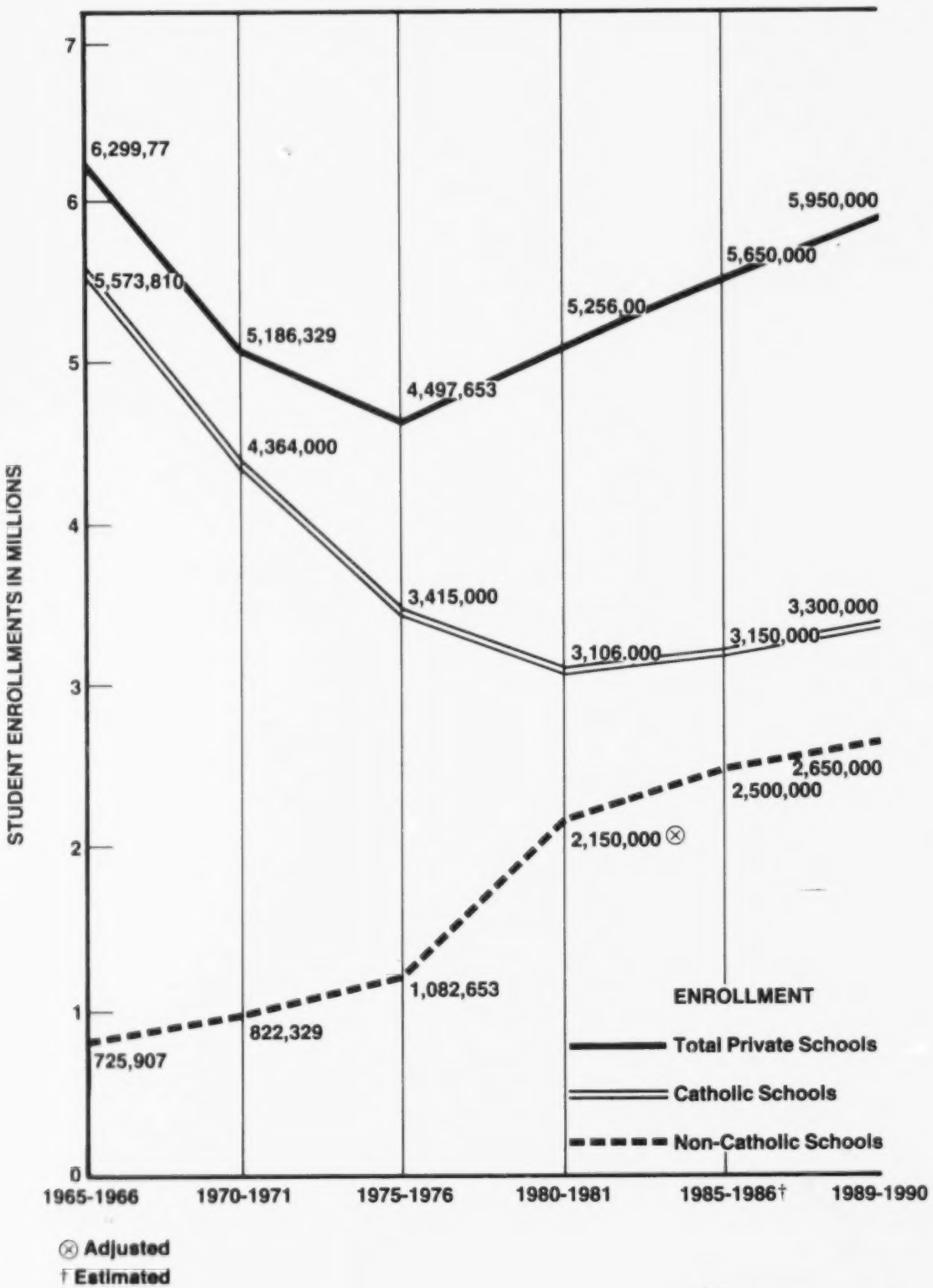
Global View of Private Schools

"The most potent motivation for founding private schools is ideology, most often organized religious ideology, but also political or cultural. Universally across countries, religious groups are the major founders of nonprofit institutions such as schools and hospitals. Once one group has established its own schools, other groups are moved to do the same as a defensive reaction to protect and sustain their own interests. The existence of this desire to maintain the supply of private schools whether they are profitable or not suggests that the private sector of schooling will be larger in countries with strong independent, proselytizing religious organizations competing for clients.

"Salient examples of this tendency occur in the Netherlands, Latin America and countries where missionaries were active, such as Japan, India and Kenya. Founders of private religious schools seek to cultivate religious faith or adherents, which is often inconsistent with maximizing profits. Many of these schools have had to charge fees lower than profit-making levels in order to attract students."

—Estelle James, *"Public & Private Schools Abroad,"* Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance, Stanford U.

Private School Enrollments by Group
1965/1966 - 1989/1990



⊗ Adjusted
† Estimated

ments in the private sector are nearly a fourth lower than their historical high of 20 years ago," he said. Private schools, however, seem to be making up earlier losses rapidly. Some claim, Catterall noted, that this private school growth indicates the "societal consensus undergirding current public schooling arrangements is seriously threatened." Cooper told the symposium that the "public school monopoly is breaking everywhere," and "the age-long compact between the public schools and the community has been broken."

Catterall is skeptical. He dissected the figures on private school growth and found that about 300,000 of the 5.2 million students in private schools are in special education programs. Under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act passed in the 1970s, which signficantly expanded programs for handicapped children, many youngsters have been placed in private care institutions when public services are not available. They still are supported by public funds, however.

Their number has grown by about 200,000 since 1980 (or 363%), half of the 400,000 increase in private school enrollment during the past three years. "Any general trend toward choosing private as opposed to public schools should probably not be confused with movements to private special education services, which are generally supported by the same public authorities," Catterall said.

Subtracting these special education students, the actual increase in regular private school enrollments since 1975 is much less, about 350,000 students, not the 650,000 commonly included in private totals, Catterall said. Viewed this way, private schools have grown by about 50,000 students a year or about 1% annually, for the last seven years. "Even if all of this increase were to represent public schoolers switching to private schools, the fraction of current public school children involved amounts to about a tenth of one percent," he said. The pace has quickened since 1980--to about 100,000 more students per year going to private schools--but "even this amounts to no more than two- or three-tenths of a percent." Clearly, Catterall concluded, "the flow of youngsters from public to private schools appears to be a trickle and not a flood" and "cannot be considered alarming."

"The most salient features of American private school life seem to be its increasing popularity, particularly when viewed alongside public school enrollment declines, and its diversity ..."
--James Catterall of UCLA in "Private School Participation and Public Policy" for a symposium at Standford U., October 1984

"For families, the emergence of diverse local private (and public) schools provides a range of educational choice as never before."
—Bruce Cooper of Fordham, U., *Teachers College Record,* Fall 1983.

Christian School Growth Slowing?

An even more modest interpretation is offered by Jay Noell of the National Institute of Education, who said Census Bureau figures show private school enrollments have held "relatively steady," rising only four-tenths of 1 percent as the proportion of total school enrollment since 1979. Whether the accelerated pace of the last three years will continue throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s is open to question, Catterall added. It would seem that the burden of maintaining the upward trend falls heaviest on the evangelical Christian schools, which have furnished the bulk of the growth to date.

However, Catterall said officials of the American Assn. of Christian Schools and the Assn. of Christian Schools International have mixed feelings about continued gains in enrollments. Some report interest in establishing Christian schools still high among parents and a large, untapped potential among the 50 million protestant evangelicals.

Others sense an "exhaustion of the pool of families most ready to establish new (Christian) schools and a decline of interest" in Accelerated Christian Education schools. These schools cost less to organize because they use packaged sets of curriculum materials and require little in specialized facilities, equipment or personnel, Catterall said. The trend reportedly is toward more "teacher-centered and traditional types of education within the Christian schools, and these schools are more difficult to establish," he said.

This may be what is happening already. The statistics, Catterall said, show a slowing in Christian school growth. In percentage terms, the falloff has been "dramatic," he said, from increases of 25% in 1976 to about 9% in 1983. In addition, "private schools seem to be becoming a relatively more expensive item for American families," he said. Tuition charged at religious private schools between 1979 and 1982 increased 74% for elementary schools to an average $569 a year and went up 45% for high schools to $1,307, Catterall said. These tuition costs increased much faster than the Consumer Price Index and two to three times greater than rises in family incomes. If this continues, he said, "the increasing cost burden could have a depressing effect" on private enrollments.

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Chapter 10

Searching for Value Choices

After many years of steady contraction in private schooling, enrollments in a variety of religious, secular, independent and even profit-making nonpublic schools have been growing recently. A careful analysis of attendance figures shows, however, that this new trend still pales in comparison to the predominance of public schools in educating American's 43 million schoolchildren. Rather, the proliferation of the various kinds of private schools attests to the new interest in educational diversity in the country and illustrates how its intensity has spilled over the old boundaries and beyond the confines of public education.

For the most part, this interest has given rise to a new generation of private schools which represents the revivalist mood in religious life. Their emphasis on spiritual training and fundamentalist Protestant doctrine has attracted a large number of parents and students who have accounted for the greatest part of private school growth in the last decade. Thus, the overriding character of the new expansionism in private education is reflected in the new evangelical Christian schools that continue to spring up in all parts of the nation.

This movement has created "a genuine alternative form of education," wrote historian William Reese. "Christian schools testify to the diversity of educational life in contemporary America." By making their schools distinctive, he said, evangelical Protestants have furnished "another option to public education" and created more variety within the larger sphere of education in general.

What factors shaped these new schools and what are they like? Patricia Lines of the Education Commission of the States said the "treatment of religious values in public schools and the corresponding development of new private schools" are intertwined. Public schools themselves were evangelical Protestant outposts at their inception and throughout most of the 19th century, she noted in a study on religion in public schools for the Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance (IFG) at Stanford U. A brief period of nondenominational religious emphasis was succeeded by the present era of officially secular practice, although nondenominationalism continues to persist in some schools in subtle ways. The secular period, mainly since World War II, recently has motivated "some fundamentalist Protestants to found their own private schools," she said.

Protestant Ethic

There are other reasons parents are turning to private schools, of course. "Maybe more people have (just) discovered the nonpublic sector," said Anne Rosenfeld, formerly director of information for the National Assn. of Independent Schools. "The morale has not been good in public education recently. I'm sure that doesn't help their enrollment picture. A lot of people are applying a consumer attitude, a shop-around attitude to public schools." But in an Information Legislative Service report on private schools, Charles O'Malley, executive assistant for private education at the U.S. Dept. of Education, said private school growth was less a rejection of public education than a desire for religious education. "People are concerned with getting moral education they can't receive in the public schools."

In a *Phi Delta Kappan* report (February 1980), two researchers found mixed motivations for private school enrollment: "poor academic quality of public education, a perceived lack of discipline in public schools, and the fact that public schools were believed to be promulgating a philosophy of secular humanism that these parents found inimical to their religious beliefs." Virginia Davis Nordin and William Lloyd Turner said their examination of fundamentalist schools in Kentucky and Wisconsin showed an aversion to rock music, movies, most television programs, long hair and modern clothing styles. These fundamentalists "perceive that the Protestant ethic has disappeared from public education philosophy," and they "voiced an increasing nostalgia and a desire to return to the practices of former days."

Two recent position papers by conservative writers expressed similar yearnings for traditional education values. Brigitte Berger of Wellesley College decried the decline of parental influence in public schools and "the pivotal role of

families in the education of their children." She said many parents want to raise their children to believe in habits and virtues such as hard work, discipline and decency, which "have been largely disregarded by educators." As a result, some parents "have turned to private schools that seem to be more adequately suited for the realization of their expectations," she wrote in a series published by the American Education Coalition, a conservative group. Writer Lawrence Uzzell also lamented the lack of discipline in schools and called for more opportunity for "parental choice." "The only practical way to protect the rights of all families is to let each family choose whatever school it finds to be most in harmony with its own philosophy and its own style," he said.

Different classes of parents choose private schools for different reasons, said Donald Erickson of UCLA. Low-income parents, often minority, enroll their children in private schools because of "unusually strong mobility aspirations" and their desire for high academic standards, he said. Most middle-class parents, who typically send their children to religious schools, are less concerned with academic achievement. They do so for religious reasons or in reaction to public school policies, involving such issues as busing or sex education, he said in a paper for IFG. Upper-middle and upper-class parents usually want "a particularly superior schooling for their children" and probably "the value of the social 'connections' established in schools to which influential people send their children," he noted. However, Erickson added, there could be a mixture of these motivations "in areas where public schools are perceived by many people as suffering serious deterioration."

Seeking Religion in Schools

For the majority of parents choosing private schools in recent years, however, the goal is a religious-based education. Robert Smith, executive director of the Council for American Private Education, quoted a church pamphlet to illustrate some parents' frustration with "changing values and sharply divided opinions on ethical matters" encountered in public schools:

> "Under such circumstances Christian parents are finding it more and more difficult to communicate Christian faith and values to their children. They know full well that such values cannot be forced. At the same time, they recognize that, like it or not, their children are developing values through the secular influences surrounding them daily. It is in these instances that the Christian day school can give invaluable assistance by providing an environment where the Word of Truth can produce a reverence and love for God, a knowledge of salvation, a passion for justice and concern for the poor and oppressed of this world."

This passage from a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod publication explains why some parents look to Christian schools for the moral certainty not found elsewhere, he said in an article in the NASSP *Bulletin* (March 1982).

There has been a growing alienation of Christian parents from the public schools since the early 1960s when the U.S. Supreme Court banned prayer in classrooms, Reese said in his study on the Christian school movement. Over the years, they also have revolted against what they see as "declining academic standards, drug abuse, school violence, teacher unions and bureaucracy," he said. They "now routinely attack public schools for undermining traditional values such as hard work, respect for authority, old-fashioned patriotism and faith in God," Reese said. Looking back, "modern conservative fundamentalists believe that contemporary public schools do not even remotely resemble schools of their childhood," Reese said, and they "commonly speak of the attractiveness of a Bible-based school, one which is tied to parents, a local congregation and a narrow community of believers." In a larger sense, "a wholesale rejection of liberal social policy (has) helped fuel evangelical opposition toward public education," Reese wrote.

White Flight Contradicted

Over the years, some parents have moved their children to private schools to evade desegregation or greater numbers of minority students, resulting in what Erickson called "allegation that the fundamentalist schools were a response to racist motivations." Reese said "hundreds of Christian schools in the South in the 1960s were formed to avoid racial integration," but both he and Erickson concluded that, as Erickson put it, such charges "are either serious oversimplifications or almost totally wrong." The Christian schools are "the result of multiple factors," primarily focused on their attempt "to build a haven from the world and its often sinful ways," he said. Even before current social changes, fundamentalist Christian schools and organizations of them were in place.

True, children attending Christian schools overwhelmingly are white, but so are the churches with which the schools are associated, Reese said. "Churches, like other institutions in society, are hardly ever well-integrated racially." Reese claimed "many fundamentalists have refused to accept white students whose parents are simply trying to avoid public school desegregation but who do not really share the educational philosophy of the particular Christian school." Many Catholic and other denominational schools also have resisted students fleeing public school desegregation over the years.

What goes on inside these Christian fundamentalist schools? A good deal is known about the preferences of the parents who send their children to them and other religious schools. However, Erickson cautioned against assuming necessarily "that the schools produce what the patrons want them to produce." He said the "modus operandi reflects pre-

dominant patron desires," but little is known about whether they fulfill the "desired effect" or outcome. As far as the physical characteristics of newer Christian schools, they tend to be small. Reese said the Assn. of Christian Schools International in 1979 determined that in 1,042 schools surveyed, the average enrollment was 218. Because nearly all are church-sponsored, the pastor of the church typically is the superintendent of the school. The teachers usually are screened for their moral and religious backgrounds, and the schools often prefer them to be trained at Bible colleges or other religiously oriented institutions. Many Christian schools object to government regulation, and the employment of teachers without state accreditation, where it is required, has led to confrontation with state officials.

When there is a national surplus of trained teachers, Reese said, the new Christian schools can hire teachers at low wages. Many of them earn only half the salaries of public school teachers and often lack fringe benefits. The low salaries help keep costs and tuitions low and make it possible for these schools to survive in hard times, he said.

The instructional program of many fundamentalist Christian schools, Reese said, consists of what he called a "teacher-proof formal curriculum," designed to "de-skill teaching" and avoid reliance on a highly trained teaching staff. It consists of curriculum packages, many from Accelerated Christian Education (discussed in Chapter 10). As of 1981, the packages were being used in about 3,500 Christian day schools, he said. They cover four main areas: math, language arts, social studies and science. They are geared to grade level and provide standardized tests which allow students to move at an individual pace and advance by passing the tests. Erickson said in many fundamentalist schools students "spend much time in small carrels, working strictly on their own, on programmed instructional modules." He said there is an increasing tendency for church-related school groups to publish their own textbooks and materials, including Lutherans, Seventh Day Adventists and others. They do so most often in subjects they consider "religiously sensitive," he said. Reese said the ACE materials are "heavily laced with religious teachings and oriented toward conservative political, economic and social viewpoints."

Dress codes and rules for personal behavior are standard at these schools, Reese said, with some students required to wear uniforms. They are expected to be patriotic and obedient to authority. At the Dade Christian School in Miami, students are required to take an oath that they will not "cheat, swear, smoke, gamble, dance, drink alcoholic beverages, use indecent language, use or even talk about narcotics and will act in a very orderly and respectful manner," Reese said. (A challenge to the authority of a parent or teacher is seen as a challenge to God's authority.) Often, parents must approve the use of corporal punishment as a condition to enrolling their children.

If rules are violated, students may be immediately dismissed. "Christian school pupils caught smoking, drinking or dancing are routinely expelled from some schools without receiving a second chance, which highlights a real difference between public and private sector education," Reese said. Unlike public schools, which must accept and try to teach a wide variety of children, he said, these Christian schools "can select their pupils, expel those who violate existing rules and therefore eliminate anyone who would disrupt the educational process."

Choices Shaped by Minorities

Private schools usually are associated with the self-reliance and independence of middle-class panache, but poor inner-city minority parents have developed their own network of nonpublic schools over the past 10 years.

There are at least 350 such schools which enroll an estimated 45,000 youngsters, according to Joan Davis Ratteray, who surveyed them for the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise in Washington, D.C.

Typically, they are run in homes, storefronts and other "inadequate physical facilities in some of the poorest inner-city neighborhoods," she said. "Yet, the teaching and learning in these schools are unparalleled." They enroll about 125 children each, concentrate on the basics, are dominated by primary grade pupils, are staffed mostly by certified teachers and boast heavy parental involvement, she said. Tuition ranges from $800 to $2,000 a year.

The parents generally have been turned off by the public schools and do not see conventional private schools as an option, often because they do not reflect their philosophies, she said.

The themes of the schools usually are religious or cultural, emphasizing, for example, Hispanic or Afro-American heritages. Parents who enroll their youngsters in these schools want "to pull away from the public schools for a while, maybe three or four years while their children are young, so they can develop good habits and study skills," she said. "The schools and parents try to give meaning to the education base through culture or religion."

Ratteray, who runs the Institute for Independent Education in Washington, D.C., said many of the schools were "started by strong families...who have gotten other families involved. In most cases, the children go on to public secondary schools," she said.

What About Performance?

A question asked frequently is: do students perform better academically in private schools than in public schools? The anecdotal evidence seems to favor private schools for various reasons, including the fact that parents unhappy with public schools are more likely to speak up if a private school experience seems favorable. Yet, the hard evidence is inconclusive. Researcher James Coleman and his colleagues contend high school students in Catholic and other private schools outperform their counterparts in public schools. The National Assessment of Educational Progress reported "no statistically significant private school advantage nationally, at any age, in either reading or mathematics." J. Douglas Willms, in a study for IFG, found no differences for white students. Although higher levels of achievement for minority and low-income students in private schools were confirmed, they were probably due to student selection, he said. "Private schools mainly get students who have higher initial ability, are better disciplined, and come from families that have higher expectations and provide considerable encouragement and support," he noted. Other researchers have sided with Willms.

The Independent Sector

In addition to religious-oriented schools, there are other private schools with outstanding academic programs and strengths in other areas. Many are part of the National Assn. of Independent Schools, which has 900 member schools in this country that enroll more than 335,000 students. They, too, have grown--by 22% since 1975. They include many of the oldest private schools in the country and the most prestigious and high-tuition day and boarding schools, located largely in the East. The schools are expressly nondiscriminatory in admission and employment practices. They are independently funded, although they may be denominationally affiliated. NAIS membership is marked by a variety of large and small, day and boarding, single-sex and coeducational and college preparatory and pre-preparatory schools. Some schools also have programs for learning-disabled students or others with achievement problems in schools. In many cases, "their diversity offers families educational choice and opportunity" not found elsewhere among private or public schools, NAIS says.

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Chapter 11

Homes As Schools

Education of children at home by parents is as old as civilization but has been largely forgotten as a serious schooling option until recently. Instruction of children by professionals away from the home has become a way of life for nearly all parents. It is, however, a relatively new tradition. For most of Western history, home education --or what may have passed for it--was a widely practiced option and "in isolated places in early America, home instruction was often the only choice," said Patricia Lines of the Education Commission of the States. "Today, in a few places in Alaska, Montana and other sparsely populated areas, this is still true."

However, it also is true that a growing number of families prefer home schooling. It remains a less-known and relatively little-practiced form of private education, but the proportion of youngsters involved probably has increased faster than in any other phase of private education. No one compiles figures on families in home education. Author John Holt estmates about 10,000 families are involved. Raymond Moore, an advocate who publishes the *Parent Educator* and *Family Report*, estimates the number at about 50,000. Kathleen McCurdy, head of the Washington Assn. of Home Educators, says between 5,000 and 10,000 families are engaged in home schooling in the state of Washington alone. Lines, director of ECS' Law and Education Center, estimates there are at least 25,000 home schoolers.

Whereas children once were schooled at home because there were no schools, the current driving force is different. "Families who now teach their children at home do so as a matter of choice, often a value-laden choice," Lines said in a 1985 report. The overriding reason is to exert more control over what the child learns, which has firm roots in the past, says M. Chester Nolte, a former university professor. Home education "is not the radical departure from tradition one might think; rather, it may be only the 'closing of the circle'...since parents in colonial times distrustfully guarded the parent prerogative of educating their own offspring as they saw fit," he wrote in a monograph on home instruction for the National Organization on Legal Problems of Education.

Reasons at Extremes

Many parents choose to educate their children at home in order to shun both public and private schools. The reasons for this are varied, although a common one is religion, a motivation shared with parents whose children enroll in Christian schools. But others "see the public school, or publicly approved private school, as too traditional or conservative," Lines said in the *Journal of Law and Education* (April 1983). Some of these parents "are strongly committed to a family-centered life and extended time with small children," Lines said. "Others believe they know best how to educate a particular child," sometimes keeping one home and sending others to schools. In fact, keeping younger children at home until they are older is common, she said.

There usually is a combination of reasons for choosing home education, McCurdy said, but mainly "parents want the best possible environment for their children and believe they know best what is good for them." Sometimes they feel the public school "is not doing a good job academically or the moral environment is not good," she said. A child may be "slow" or gifted, she said, but the school is not providing what he or she needs to succeed educationally. A majority of these parents want to "instill their religious values in their children" and believe that can best be done at home, McCurdy said.

> *"The increasing incidence of home education--in which parents turn away from the public schools to teach their children themselves--is a development that is significant and symbolic out of proportion with its relatively small numbers... (it is) related to the expansion of options and choice (and) the efforts of people to assume more direct responsibility for their lives and their learning (and their childrens' learning)."*
> — Mario Fantini, "Adapting to Diversity — Future Trends in Curriculum." *NASSP Bulletin*, May 1985.

Although it sometimes requires conflicts with state compulsory education laws, families which decide to educate their children at home make a commitment that sets them apart from the mainstream of society. "These disparate groups (of parents) have in common a strong resistance to the ideal of the American public schools as the melting pot of the nation and a willingness to defy the law rather than conform to the ideals implicit in public school philosophy," Lines said. Because the parents' motives are disparate and their philosophies so varied, "the public education system is caught in the middle, unable to please everyone," she added. But some home educators also "recognize the value of family choice to public educators, who cannot constitutionally provide a religious orientation to the program," Lines added.

Is It Education?

From the parents' point of view, home schooling fulfills their wishes, but do their children receive an adequate education? "Some educators are deeply concerned," Lines said. They are troubled that these children "will fail academically or socially" and "are not acquiring fundamental skills needed for good citizenship and self-sufficiency," she said. They also worry about the "long-range implications of large numbers of the population insulating themselves from the mainstream of society." There is little evidence on what happens to children schooled at home or how they turn out. But Lines said the evidence does not support educators' worst concerns. "Parents typically think through their teaching methods," and many are former teachers. "All in all," she said, "parents generally try to design home programs to meet the individual needs of their children." A few testing programs involving home schooling have shown that these children achieve as well or better than those in schools, although the studies were not well-controlled.

The biggest controversy surrounding home schooling has been over state regulation and legal questions. Home education often runs headlong into state compulsory attendance laws, which aim to ensure that children receive the education they need to become self-sufficient adults and responsible citizens. The typical state law, Lines said, requires parents of children aged 7 through 15 to educate their children or send them to schools--or face a range of penalties. Compulsory education laws in 38 states expressly permit home instruction or otherwise require that children be educated in lieu of school attendance, Lines said. Seventeen states had no statutory provision for home instruction until 1985, when legislatures renewed action on home schooling.

Acceptable methods of complying with compulsory education requirements outside an accredited school vary widely among the states. In most, private education must be approved by the state through the state department of education or the local school board. In general, the state usually requires a home education program to be "equivalent" or "comparable" to that of a school. However, Lines said, those terms usually are ill-defined, which have caused many legal disputes. In Massachusetts, Nolte said, the commissioner of education has established criteria which say home schoolng may be approved depending on:

- Whether the child is receiving at least the same number of hours of instruction in each required subject as the public school student.
- Whether the parents or tutors are competent to teach the children and are doing so diligently, consistently and in good faith.
- Whether the textbooks, material, methods and program used in the home instruction are adequate.
- Whether the child will be tested periodically to measure educational progress and to ensure that minimal standards are being maintained.

"...the advent of new technologies...provide many more tools for learning and enable people to take more responsibility for their own learning. The introduction of electronic communications and interactive media provide access to wide networks of information formerly unavailable or inaccessible. This rise in computer literacy and the popularity of the home computer combine to provide many more opportunities and means for learning outside the formally defined walls of the school."

— Mario Fantini, "Adapting to Diversity — Future Trends in Curriculum." *NASSP Bulletin*, May 1985.

State Courts Vary

Court decisions delineating the rights of parents to educate their children at home as well as the interest of the states to regulate the content of the education have been far from consistent. However, most courts have interpreted state constitutional provisions and laws as to permit home instruction, although the states usually have rights to set rules on how it is accomplished. Some courts, however, have prohibited home schooling outright. A federal appellate court in North Carolina upheld that state's prohibition of a home instruction program by parents; in Arkansas, the state supreme court found home-schooling parents guilty of violating the compulsory schooling law. Both rulings came in 1984.

In a Kansas case a year earlier, the state supreme court found a mother's home education plan did not meet the requirements of the state compulsory attendance law. The court said the plan "though well-intentioned, (was) a thinly veiled subterfuge attacking compulsory school attendance," and "if such a family arrangement will serve as a substitute

for school, there is no compulsory attendance." Two brothers and their wives were jailed in Idaho for an extended period in 1984 for keeping their children at home and not complying with a state law requiring an approved home study course. The U.S. Supreme Court never has ruled definitively on home education but did decline to review the North Carolina appellate decision upholding the state's ban.

Parents and advocates are making widespread efforts to ease state restrictions on home schooling or change state laws prohibiting it. Arkansas, New Mexico, Washington and Wyoming approved legislation in 1984 specifically permitting home education for the first time. In Idaho, however, a move to reduce state requirements for approved home schooling programs was defeated. These legislative efforts indicate, Lines and others said, that many home schooling advocates and practitioners are surfacing for the first time, "coming out of the closet" after many years of operating in defiance of laws.

In Washington State, where home schooling is said to be flourishing, a law making it legal was approved in 1985 over the opposition of professional education groups. The legislation under consideration finally came down to a debate over the qualifications to be required of parents who choose to school their own children. Many educators had pushed for supervision by an adult with a teaching certificate. But the adopted bill requires only completion of one year of college or passage of a course on home education at a postsecondary institution. Students educated at home also must be tested annually or evaluated by a certified teacher.

The future of home schooling, although its practice is being authorized in more and more states, may be circumscribed by some inherently limiting factors. "High costs of home instruction, together with the obvious disruption of home life and the arrest of parental freedoms because of the home student program, will no doubt work to limit the spread of home instruction further," Nolte said. The costs involve instructional materials which parents need to educate their children. It is no easy task to educate children--at home or at school--and there have been reports of parents who gave up after a period of trying to teach their own youngsters. "The burden of home instruction is one that few parents can sustain for a long period," Lines said.

Home Study Without Controversy

When children are educated at home, school districts usually lose the state aid that comes with the enrollment of students, but in California one superintendent discovered a way to avoid the loss of such funds. Whether school districts in other states could do the same is not known, but California officials think it is worth exploring--just as Marilyn DeVore did.

Under California law, school districts can enter into an "independent study agreement" with parents who intend to school their children at home. The parents are required to meet certain standards, including supervision by a certificated teacher, providing or allowing measurement of the child's academic progress and offering a course of study equivalent to that of the school district in which the family lives. These agreements allow districts to count the students for state aid purposes.

Parents need not enter into such agreements to educate their children at home, however. They also can provide tutors or simply file an affidavit with the state that their children will be educated in a "private school" at home, which requires virtually no supervision. But in these cases, the school districts receive no credit for enrollment toward state aid.

More than 500 of California's 1,044 districts now permit independent study agreements. "It is a win-win alternative," said Lynn Hartzler of the state Dept. of Education. "The districts get the revenue, and the parents get the program they believe in."

The independent study agreement was designed for and used by students out of school for long periods of time on vacations, temporary job transfers of parents or in disciplinary situations. DeVore, former superintendent in Nevada City and now home schooling director for Butte County, "dreamed up" its use for home schooling, and "we promote it," Hartzler said.

She and other school officials think many "home-study" parents would agree to such independent study arrangements if more districts would offer the option.

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Chapter 12

The Issue of Tax Credits

The most extreme manifestation of diversity in education today is the proposal of public funding for private schools through tuition tax credits and vouchers. Both ideas have been around a long time, but they have received more serious attention in recent years because of one factor: the renewed interest in choices in education. President Reagan and other leading advocates characterized tuition tax credits and vouchers in those terms, which itself is a departure from past justifications for their adoption. Much of the current debate over American education is dominated, of course, by reform of the public schools themselves. But tuition tax credits and vouchers share the forum as ways to improve schooling through greater choice. They also create as much controversy as any other topic in education, aligning most professional educators on one side against them and the Reagan administration, some reformers and many school critics on the other.

Yet, despite all the rhetoric, there has been no implementation, and tuition tax credits and vouchers remain nothing more than hotly contested ideas. Are they educational alternatives with a future? Or has their time come and gone? These questions are being asked more frequently now as the political climate favorable to their enactment seems to be fading. Still, that does not mean they won't resurface again--as they have in the past.

Although a tuition tax credit bill almost was approved by Congress in 1978, it was President Reagan's election that exposed the idea to new heights of visibility. It became a cornerstone of his administration's policies on schooling by redefining aid to private education through tax credits and vouchers as part of general federal support for education. Early in 1985 President Reagan reaffirmed his strong support before a conference of the National Assn. of Independent Schools, saying "Parents should have greater freedom to send their children to the schools they desire, and to do so without interference by local, state or federal levels of government." He reiterated that "diversity and competition among schools should be encouraged" and said "tuition tax credits and education vouchers would foster greater diversity and, hence, higher standards throughout our system of education."

ED Secy. William Bennett said they also would provide "accountability...if parents had a greater ability to choose another school." School "improvement can be aided by redesigning public education to ensure accountability through instruments of choice" via tuition tax credits and vouchers which would foster greater access to private schools, he said.

Reagan and Bennett have encouraged governors and other state officials to enact voucher plans within their borders. On the federal level, they have proposed compensatory education vouchers, which would allow federal dollars now going to school districts for low-achieving students to be used for either public or private education services. "Parents of educationally disadvantaged children would receive one voucher, worth several hundred dollars per child," Bennett said. "They would be free to use the vouchers at any school they choose."

Thus parents of limited means would have the choice in schooling for their children that more affluent parents long have had, Bennett said. Each child would receive a voucher worth about $500 a year if the $3.2 billion distributed under the Chapter 1 program were divided among participating students.

The tuition tax credit bill proposed in the first term of the Reagan administration would have provided federal in-

"The plans for the privatization of education (through vouchers and tuition tax credits) go against the principle that there is public purpose for education, that education is a public good, and that education policies should be determined through a public policy-making process. There is reasonable concern that special interest groups would promote their own sectarian interests through publicly supported private schools which would severely weaken social and political cohesion in the United States."

— Trade Union Advisory Committee to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1982.

come tax credits of up to $300 a year per student when fully implemented for families with incomes of $40,000 or less. The administration's tuition tax credit bill was defeated in the Senate by a 2-1 margin. As of spring 1985, the Chapter 1 voucher proposal had never come to a vote.

More Questions than Answers

In any voucher plan, parents would, in effect, receive monetary vouchers to send their children to schools of their choice--as authorized by the plan. The schools then would redeem the vouchers from the government. How much the vouchers would be worth, what kind of schools would be eligible to receive the voucher students and under what conditions they would be allowed to participate are among the many questions surrounding voucher plans. Questions abound because no voucher plan ever has become operational and, in fact, no detailed system ever has been laid out. (A federally sponsored experiment in the Alum Rock, Calif., public schools during the 1970s was so heavily restricted that it was really an open enrollment program involving only district schools, rather than a voucher plan.) Hence, there are countless unknowns about how a voucher plan would work, which provides abundant grist for discussion and disagreements.

Among the first and most persistent voucher advocates were John Coons and Stephen Sugarman, U. of California law professors who wrote *Education By Choice: The Case for Family Control*. They argue that parents should have the right to send their children to any school that meets certain criteria, using public funds in the same way that veterans can spend G.I. Bill funds at colleges of their choice. Unlike unregulated voucher proposals, such as that put forward by economist Milton Friedman, theirs would have certain controls. (Most other voucher plans also propose various restrictions on parental choice.) Coons and Sugarman, for example, would require schools participating in a voucher program to disclose certain information about themselves to parents.

Also, if voucher schools charged more for tuition than the public vouchers were worth, they would have to adjust the tuition according to the income of parents so as not to prevent participation by poor parents. The schools would be re-

quired to set aside a portion--they suggest 25%--of the enrollment spaces for children from lower-income families. Such a plan, they say, would "facilitate the deregulation of the public sector (of education)," bring together parents and teachers to create "the kinds of schools desired by both" and free both parents and students to realize their educational dreams.

Vouchers, first proposed in the late 1960s, have reemerged in an atmosphere, acknowledged by Coons and Sugarman, of "deregulation" and competition, which they endorse in education. *The Wall Street Journal*, in an editorial, applauded vouchers as a vehicle for "injecting competition and choice into what has become a sluggish monopoly." They are part of a larger movement among industrial nations to "privatize" major public services, such as education, wrote Geoff Whitty of the U. of London in *Educational Leadership* (April 1984). The goal is to "make the public sector behave more like the private sector by competing for clients in the open market," he said. Besides providing more choices for parents, Bennett said the competition created by vouchers "will be one of the best catalysts to make some of (the public schools) improve their performance."

The Arguments Against

The National Education Assn., the American Federation of Teachers and other education groups strongly oppose vouchers. They believe vouchers would foster "educational hucksterism" and actually lower school quality overall, in part through a proliferation of shoddy schools and the departure of many able students from the public schools for private schools. Indeed, the potential for abuse--public funding of school programs that the general citizenry likely would be unwilling to support--is one of the main arguments against vouchers.

This argument raises serious questions about the public's interest in the education of children, which has been the prime rationale for public schools since their inception, versus the exercise of private choice by parents. It also raises a very large potential problem in regulating or controlling voucher schools. Coons and Sugarman acknowledge a need

"Tuition tax credits and vouchers on a national scale represent an idea whose time has indeed come."
--President Reagan in *A Blueprint for Education Reform*, edited by Connaught Marshner, Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, 1984.

for some regulation, but how much is proper and who is to provide enforcement and how? Many have pointed out that the states now regulate private schools to varying degrees, and that state power over private schools could well be increased under a publicly funded voucher system. Legislators likely would want more say in how public funds were spent.

Ideally, vouchers would open up more schools to the many minority students who have had no choice but to attend racially imbalanced public schools. But how are nondiscriminatory practices in voucher schools to be assured without extensive government regulation? The questions raised by critics and others are almost endless, and while they may be answerable, until vouchers are put into practice, they stand together as a formidable obstacle to their enactment.

The pros and cons of tuition tax credits cover much the same ground, except that tax credits could cut deeply into government revenues by giving tax breaks to parents paying tuition. Estimates range from $600 million to $1.3 billion in losses in federal government tax revenues. In his analysis of the effects of tax credits, economist David Breneman said the tax savings would probably be too little to cause families to switch their children from public to private schools in great numbers. Thus, he said, the benefits probably would go to parents with children already in private schools, which Diane Ravitch of Columbia U. called "the best case against tuition tax credits" because they would benefit so few and at a considerable cost in tax funds.

The Private Dilemma

Many private education groups staunchly support tuition tax credits, and some believe private schools badly need such aid. "If we don't get aid, there is no survival (of religious schools)," Martin Mullen, chairperson of a recent conference on private school aid, declared. But such aid also poses a dilemma. Private schools strongly oppose governmental controls that may flow from it. Historian William Reese called it "both inconsistent and possibly dangerous for many private school activists to refuse to accept state regulation...and then to lobby for various forms of direct and indirect aid for their schools."

Whether vouchers or tax credits pass constitutional muster is another major question that has not been answered. The U.S. Supreme Court struck down a New York state program that provided credits for school tuition. However, a Minnesota tax deduction plan was upheld by the court in 1983, the first of its kind to be ruled constitutional. Legal authorities have debated the issue at length, but it remains far from settled.

The controversy and complexities surrounding vouchers and tuition tax credits may be taking their toll in the political arena. Although President Reagan and Bennett have insisted they will continue to push hard for their enactment, there are signs the administration is not doing so aggressively, in part because the loss of revenues through tax credits would worsen the huge federal budget deficit. Since President Reagan's first term, voucher and tax credit proposals have received "no more than warm rhetoric and a long waltz through the legislative process," Ravitch said in *The New Republic* (Dec. 3, 1984)

Polls show an erosion of public support for tuition tax credits, and tax credit measures have been defeated in all states where they were submitted to voters, James Catterall of the UCLA noted in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* (Winter 1984). Although vouchers were favored by 51% in a 1983 Gallup Poll, they have not won enough support in legislatures or in public sentiment to be implemented in spite of numerous efforts. Minnesota has seriously considered an all-public school voucher plan, an approach which has attracted attention in several other states. But vouchers and tax credits encompassing private schools appear to be farther from reality than was the case a few years ago.

Minnesota Arguments

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld Minnesota's tax deduction for elementary and secondary school expenses in 1983, declaring the law constitutionally valid in a narrow 5-4 decision. Writing for the majority opinion, Justice William Rehnquist gave five reasons for allowing the tax credit:

- The benefits meet the test of legitimate tax deduction, contributing to the public welfare and reducing involvement between church and state.
- The credits benefit church schools only indirectly, providing, instead, direct relief to parents.
- The benefits are broad, applying to all parents of school-age children, no matter whether they choose public or private schools.
- The law gives parents of private school children greater equity.
- The law does not establish a particular religion.

Mueller v. Allen

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Chapter 13

Planning for Choices

Choice doesn't just mean educational options for parents and students. It also represents a major policy option for school districts, one that has many school leaders enthusiastic and optimistic about its potential for reaching new standards of excellence in public schools. Choice entails providing parents and students with attractive alternatives to the regular school program, and the most successful way districts have found to do this is through magnets of various sizes and descriptions. Their popularity among both parents, as schooling options, and decision-makers, as policy options, has triggered a steady increase in their numbers over the past few years.

Four superintendents substantially experienced with the startup and operation of magnets, interviewed for this special report, strongly advocate their consideration by school districts. "Magnets better meet the diverse interests of the student body, their goals and those of society," Lee McMurrin of the Milwaukee schools said. "They enable a better match between those diverse interests and what the schools can offer." McMurrin believes "every district should consider this kind of option."

Harry Handler of Los Angeles said magnets are successful "because the students and the parents want to be there," which increases participation and support. Robert Bridges of the Wake County, N.C., schools said that although a relatively small percentage of parents typically have their children in magnets, "the impact that group has on the overall attitude of parents makes more parents want to get involved." It produces "a general groundswell of involvement" as parents "interact in the community and with other parents," he said.

The superintendents agreed with David Bennett of the St. Paul, Minn., schools that "magnets cause parents who might not otherwise consider it to keep their children in public schools." McMurrin said, "We were supposed to have 500 to 600 fewer students in our high schools this year (1984-85), but when we started school we had 500 to 600 more. It surprised us." He attributed the turnaround in part to "the attractiveness of our magnet programs." Bennett believes if parents see their "choice between diversified private options versus monolithic public schools," then the public schools can be the losers. "But it need not be," he added. "We can offer tremendous variety in public education."

Steps to Choice

How have they gone about it? The superintendents, who run some of the most elaborate and sophisticated choice programs in the nation, offered these suggestions for organizing alternative systems:

- The community. Handler and Bridges believed their jobs were to "sell" magnets to the community and its representatives, the school board. Handler started with a survey of parents on magnet choices. Bennett said the first step was "protracted community development" with "parents literally making recommendations on the programs" to be offered.
- Planning. This phase is critical, they said. McMurrin recommended developing a philosophy behind magnets and fashioning policies from that. Bennett said the planning staff should provide a wide range of magnet ideas, explain them to the community and mold them from community reactions. "We developed our curriculum before going outside," Bridges said, "and then we adjusted based on community reaction." Both he and Bennett warned against presenting a "blank slate" to the community devoid of suggested themes and configurations, which Bridges said would make the process "unmanageable."
- Funding. All agreed choices cost more--but not much more. Handler said the Los Angeles magnets cost an average $50 more per student over the regular school program. "We try to use as a guiding axiom that the amount of money (spent on magnets) will be about the same," he said. "Otherwise, they become elitist." Some magnets can be costly, the superintendents said, although state and federal funds often have helped finance them. McMurrin noted that magnets involving advanced technology require more funds for equipment but said, "We could have started many without more money." These would be elementary magnets and secondary programs in the humanities. Bennett said spending more is justified if the money goes to making magnets legitimately different and is not spent on what any school could do, such

as lowering class size. "It does cost more to do it the way you like to do it," Handler said. "Everything is not standardized. A multiplicity of norms costs more." Bennett noted that private contributions remain a major untapped source of funds for magnets in specialty fields.

- Staffing. Handler and Bennett advocate giving principals considerable leeway in hiring teachers. One way, Handler said, is by "broadening and incorporating into job descriptions certain unique skills and experiences" that magnets need from teachers and principals. Bennett said magnet schools need to be selective in their hiring of teachers because some of the positions are "highly specialized." But, he added, when converting regular schools to magnet schools, it should be done with sensitivity toward the existing staff. Those teachers should be "accorded special considerations to make secure their choice" of assignments, Bennett said.
- Implementation. McMurrin suggests that community members, university faculty and other specialists assist and advise on launching magnets because "it doesn't come out of a textbook." Bridges said timely implementation worked best for his magnet plan. "We sold it for six months, developed it and initiated it" in a total of nine months, he said. "Once you decide what it's going to be, you need to put it in place rather quickly or it could get chipped away."
- Equity. All the programs were designed to maintain a good ethnic balance, but Bennett said two factors are crucial. One is to "reduce to a minimum the prerequisites for access," which makes more students eligible to participate. The exception is gifted and talented magnets, but qualifications for even these can be broadened to widen access. The other factor, which Bennett said is the most common problem of achieving equity in magnets, is accepting enrollment on a first-come, first-served basis. That tends "to serve the quickest and most alert who already are being served best" by the schools, he said. It often creates at least an appearance of unfairness. The better method is setting a deadline for applications and holding a random drawing for admission.

One caution that Bennett offered concerns what he calls the "inevitable invidious comparisons" between magnets and regular schools. "If the district is not careful, it develops a reputation of magnet schools being good and attendance area schools being bad," he said. He suggested an "effective schools strategy" to "promote excellence" in regular schools and make it possible so "parents can make choices but not 'bad' choices."

Can Choice Be 'Basic' Too?

The trend toward more options for students under magnets and other alternative education programs may be on a collision course with the movement to increase the academic "core" courses students will need to graduate from high school.

"By the time they cover the (increased academic) requirements, there is less time to cover the students' individual interests," said Los Angeles Supt. Harry Handler. He and other superintendents of districts with large magnet programs complain that new graduation standards reduce the flexibility magnets need to succeed.

"It is a new constraint," Handler said. "Things are so highly proscribed (by the state)." Handler long has supported a strong academic program, and Los Angeles moved to strengthen course requirements in the 1970s before the reform movement got under way. But, he said, the tougher standards "make it more difficult to provide choices for students," a concept he also supports.

Former U.S. Dept. of Education Secy. Terrel Bell and California state Supt. Bill Honig, two leading advocates of higher academic standards, do not anticipate a clash between magnet curricula for example, and increased graduation requirements. "If you get a specialized high school, say a magnet, that is neglecting academic requirements, then it is doing a disservice," Bell said. "It all depends on what the alternative opportunities are, if they neglect mastery learning." Bell fails to "see incompatibility" between alternatives and core requirements, but, he said, "I worry about high schools with smorgasbord curricula and letting students have too much choice."

Honig, who helped push through tougher academic standards in California schools, said the "state sets the standards, and the districts and schools can exercise flexibility" as to how those standards are met. He believes there is enough flexibility in California law and regulations to permit alternatives such as magnets to function adequately. There are many methods, he said, to accommodate magnet programs and meet state academic requirements through creative approaches. "I taught in an alternative school that had core subjects," and the school did both very well, Honig added.

A Public Relations Plan for Education Choices

The demand for choices presents an opportunity to build community support for a "learning society." This checklist from the National School Public Relations Assn. is designed to help with plans that ensure the issue of choice will have positive results for schools and communities alike. It includes the four elements of a viable public relations plan: research, planning, actions and communications and evaluation.

Research

- Develop a brief history of educational choices within your community.
- Prepare an inventory of the range of choices available to students of all ages within your community—pre-school and day-care programs, school courses, alternative programs, higher education opportunities, community education programs, commercially available education opportunities or training offered by business-industry.
- Collect and analyze enrollment data from these offerings.
- Prepare background information, based on the data and analysis, for decision-makers in the community—school board members, business leaders, parent and teacher leaders.
- Determine interest in and commitment to developing further choices in education for your community.

Planning

- If significant interest in choices is found, develop plans to involve as many groups and interested individuals as possible, making sure that the advisory committee(s) represent the varied interests of the community.
- Prepare staff recommendations for an overall plan to broaden choices, using data considered, but each influencing [illegible] projected enrollment figures [illegible] other demographic data, such as [illegible] number of working mothers, [illegible] transportation and space and [illegible] interest [illegible] in educational [illegible] Develop [illegible] on what choices and [illegible] you support choices that could be [illegible] by the schools.

Action and Communication

- Ensure that [illegible] of educational choices within the community are well-publicized and reach all segments [illegible] community.
- Be prepared to [illegible] information about expanded choices [illegible] after a plan is adopted.
- Use all [illegible] channels available, internally and [illegible] for pupils, parents and general public to ensure that everyone is well-informed about changes produced by the offering of greater choice.
- Consider using [illegible] technologies, such as cable programming [illegible] to keep parents, students and the general community informed about what is happening in the choices.

Evaluation

- Publicize [illegible] of the choices and establish ways for [illegible] participants to receive feedback from parents and the community regarding the choices.
- Use evaluation results for a new cycle of planning, action and communication.

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